

TO
HELL
AND
BACK



Nota
Bene

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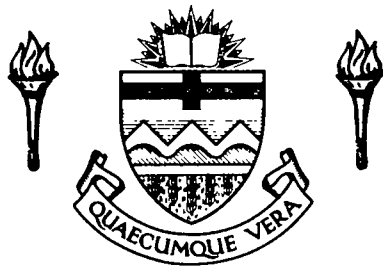


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To Hell and Back

TO HELL AND BACK

by

Nota Bene

A story of life, its trials, perplexities, and the influence environment has in molding our characters; woven in Canadian background especially the pioneer days of the Western prairies, thrilling adventures from the Great War and how religious views are transformed by the power of circumstances.



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TO HELL AND BACK

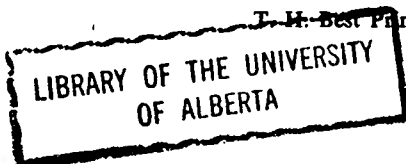
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Dear Reader:—

To you we dedicate this work, in which it has been our ideal to give you a pen picture of life, from psychological viewpoint, trusting thereby that from the trials, and experiences of others, you will get a clearer and better understanding on how to meet your own.

NOTA BENE.

INTRODUCTION

"Read not to contradict and confute, nor to believe and take for granted, but to weigh and consider."—Lord Bacon.

THE PRAIRIES of Western Canada known as the "great open spaces," have given us many thrilling stories of its early days, stories of its fame as a hunter's paradise with its roving Buffalo herds; of the wild and exciting life and the trials of its hardy frontiersmen. Few, however, have lifted a pen to tell of later generations, generally classed as Western Pioneers—the men and women, who, through many difficulties, transformed its vast grassy plains into what is now termed the granary of the British Empire, through a combination of soil fertility, climatic conditions, and their long hours of hard labor. Many of whom found time to build for themselves happy homes, thriving towns and great industrial cities.

It is, however, with apologies, from a literary viewpoint, that we presume to bring before you, in story form, the lives of some of those people whose paths crossed ours from the late eighties on, and have them tell in their own way of their trials, successes, and ideals which they strove to live up to. In order that we may have a more sympathetic understanding of what people think, say and do in life's varied environments, we consider it necessary to go back to the childhood days of our hero to find how many of the convictions he then formed were to play an important part in his later life.

This takes us back to the late eighties, before union labor laws were enacted, and closing of stores at five or six o'clock in the afternoon would be considered an outrage, especially in country towns, for no place afforded such a setting for an informal forum at which all kinds of discussions could be held as the country store. Here for reasons untraced, every subject under the sun was brought up and discussed without fear or favor, as the pioneers sat around the big stoves, on counters, boxes and a few chairs during the long evenings and often part of the nights, from November until March. During those long debates many would help themselves

to the merchant's peanuts or other convenient tidbits, while others smoked such strong pipes or strong tobacco that their fumes put every moth on the dusty shelves into a comatose state. Many of the discussions would have done credit to some of the best orators of the land, while others were just talks of the humdrum happenings of the district, for here, settled on homesteads over these vast plains, were to be found men and women—mostly men—from all walks of life and most countries, from derelict sailor to educated scion of noble family filled with wanderlust and ambition, but who knew life, labor and honor.

Most of the discussions, however, usually wound up with talk on religion, and quite often grew so hot that it was not necessary to add further fuel to the fire, even if a 30 below Nor'wester was coming through every crack in the mushroom building. Therefore, religion must play an integral part in this story which we have entitled "TO HELL AND BACK" as our hero, after many trials and adversities in early life, returned from the Great War (which in part is true) to find his home broken up, and his wife re-married, causing him to say in agonizing prayer, "Oh merciful God, physically and mentally I have been through Hell, is it possible Thou would bring me back to this?"

With this foreward we will now leave you to travel with our hero over life's rugged pathway.

NOTA BENE.

To Hell and Back

CHAPTER 1

"The man who will not investigate both sides of a question is dishonest."—Abraham Lincoln.

APART from what the title may suggest to you let your thoughts now be directed to a typical old Ontario farm with its hills and dales, and a long lane running up to a big frame house, conspicuous from lack of recent painting, whose spacious and airy rooms seem to give the secret of the peace and tranquility that pervades the place. Behind the house stands a large frame barn and sheds, with a commodious farmyard, containing part of last year's straw-stack. In the yard well-groomed horses, sleek-skinned cattle, docile sheep and grunting hogs can be seen together with various species of farm fowl—all of which gives to the scene an air of prosperity and plenty. The bright beams of an April sun add to the enchantment of the scene. The farm is located on a stretch of rising ground overlooking the blue waters of Lake Ontario, which reflects back its beauty like a magic mirror. The northern boundary is a long ridge of giant pines from whose cone-shaped tops and waving branches an enchanting drone is wafted over the serene calm of the balmy spring day, making a vibration as it were, on the chords of your heart seemingly say truly, "It is ethereal music, and if God speaks out of Nature, it is through these stately stalwart giants." The place was most aptly named—Pine Ridge.

Such was the home, in the late eighties that was brightened by the arrival of Robert Benson, and during the next few years by a brother George and sister Mary. The father was George Benson, with his wife Margaret, who were of the thrifty English-type farmers, brought up on nearby farms, in the school of hard knocks. Their parents had settled in what was then a heavy bush country, full of wild life, having come out from England in the early Fifties, after a trying trip in an old sailing vessel, and bringing with them energy, thrift and religious views that characterized the old type of English settlers, who were the kind that has made England's name stand out as a monument before the world for perseverance and colonizing ability.

This was the environment in which Robert, George, and sister

Mary were born and grew up, being drilled from early childhood in the importance of obedience and religion, as seen from the Methodist viewpoint. Every Sunday, rain or shine, whether in the long days of summer and dusty paths, or through the snow-drifted roads of winter, the heavy farm team was hitched to the democrat, or sleigh, and the four-mile trip was made to the little church at Mapleton, where the Scripture truths were imparted in such a way as to strengthen one's faith and generate peace and goodwill—every precept being followed as closely as possible in everyday life. At home, family worship was part of each day's exercise, beginning with morning prayers, and in the evening, scriptural readings.

In this way, the years rolled by, till at the age of seven, Robert was started to school, which meant a long walk, as it was situated on the concession line two miles distant. Part of the trail there passed through a cedar swamp, through which ran a crystal stream over a bed of sand and gravel with many a nook and old log, behind which hid the sportive brook trout whose beautiful markings were often a magnet of attraction as they gambolled forth after the unwary fly. This caused Robert, as he grew older, to miss the roll-call many a time, accounting for his late arrival home in the evenings with often a nice string to offer with his apology, during the long summer months.

In winter, a more direct route could be taken across the fields. So in between times when a strong ambitious boy could be used on the farm, young Robert received his education, the routine being seldom broken, for with the exceptions of a couple of church picnics, an occasional quilting bee, and a trip to the market-town a couple of times a year, there was nothing to detract his attention from school. At the age of thirteen, therefore, he was well-advanced in his studies, besides being a strong robust type of boy, due to the nourishing meals which his mother knew so well how to prepare on the smallest outlay of cash, thrift being the predominant ideal towards building up a home. A stick of golden-brown candy with darkened twisted stripes for effect, known as saw-longs, of which six could be purchased for five cents was considered a luxury.

Shortly after Robert's thirteenth birthday, more land having to be broken and cleared in accordance with the terms of the lease on which the farm was held, it was found that the work had outgrown his father, so that he was kept home over the summer months to follow a team, while George and Mary continued their studies at school. Work, being done in the vigorous manual manner

of the old days, when every time a walking plow would hit a stone, the plowman would get such a rap in the ribs as to knock his wind out, proved to be no joke, and he was soon to realize how early in life, for very little remuneration, some boys are called upon to take a man's place. However, with a light heart and dominant faith in the future, he took hold of each day's task with the spirit that makes success.

During the two years that were to follow the crops were practically a failure. The first year a cold backward spring and early frosts was the cause, while the next year's drought was responsible so that his father's small financial reserves were so reduced that he was almost poverty-stricken, a circumstance in which many farmers often found themselves after signing long leases at exorbitant rentals with no consideration for off seasons. When November the first came that year, it required the selling of the last bushel of grain and some of the stock to satisfy the landlord, who insisted he must have his rent, though it was known that he had plenty of money in the bank to lend out at high rates of interest to those whose positions obliged them to borrow from him, thus placing them in his clutches.

Although the landlord was a deacon in the little church they both attended, once outside its walls, his hypocritical piety was cast off with as much ease as his frock coat. A more inconsistent old scoundrel could hardly be found to disgrace the Bible injunction, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you."

Thus, after making the payment Farmer Benson had no capital with which to carry on, and as most of his friends, being in the same position, could not render him the necessary assistance, he was obliged to sell the balance of the stock and leave the farm, after endeavoring to secure a smaller one without success. Fate seemed to be playing its hand, as so often proves the case in such circumstances, to pull a man of sterling character down in to the quagmire of misery and contempt by opening up an opportunity, as will be seen, that would verify it as the Power of Evil. Some might call it bad luck, others by a more appropriate name!

Centreton, a village, was some ten miles distant on the cross-roads of the main highway. It had formerly been an inter-section when a tollgate had been in operation there, causing the traveller to pay or travel through the bog holes of the corduroy-made side roads. Centreton consisted of a store, post-office, blacksmith shop and wagon-shop. In addition there was the church, minister's

home and a few other public and private buildings. Most prominent was the hotel, called the Beacon, which more properly could have been called, "The Bummer's Roost," as, for many years it had been made the rendezvous of those who wanted a place to loaf, those indifferent to being regularly employed, or those trying to sponge a drink from the transient guest. It was the kind of hotel that served in grandpa's day, and was the scene of many drunken brawls. The owner had recently died from being a too-much regular customer of his own merchandise. This was the only opportunity that opened up to George Benson when his need became most urgent. The postmaster at Mapleton, who had heard of the place through the mail-carrier, who made the trip through from the country town every day, suggested it to his friend as a temporary lodging without ever giving it any thought, further than knowing of George's position. It appeared to be a possible way out. Apart from mentioning it to his wife, the suggestion received very little consideration from George at the time.

A few days later, however, Destiny was to play its hand. A letter was received, bearing a lawyer's signature, saying, in effect, that, unless a new lease was signed at once, possession of George's farm would be required December first, in two weeks' time. As it was impossible to carry on without seed or feed for the stock, George Benson and his wife had many discussions in which they sought a solution to the problem of the family's future. Mrs. Benson, as a true mother, was mainly concerned with her children's welfare, and as she knew very little about a publican's life, except what she had heard of men drinking and getting drunk, she abhorred the idea of taking the children to such a place. To make a living on the returns of another's sorrow, she felt would be the height of hypocrisy. After another week of uncertainty had passed, with but three days remaining before dispossession of the farm, George intimated that leasing the hotel was the only immediate solution to their problem. "If no other way opens by tomorrow, in answer to our prayers," Margaret, his wife, said, "I shall look upon it then as God's Will, and you can go and see about getting the lease." The usual thing happened under such conditions. The morrow came, and George Benson was obliged to sign a lease for three years, making him the proprietor of the Beacon Hotel at Centreton.

CHAPTER 2

*"In the day of prosperity, we have many refuges
to resort to; in the day of adversity, only one."*—
Horatius Bonar.

IF THE difficulties of the past three weeks had proved a surprise to the Bensons, whose faith had always been founded on what they considered to be the infallible promises of the word of God, their first day at The Beacon provided a greater one. The usual chair-warmers were in their accustomed places, with Big Jake Harkins sitting on the short end of the bar, his feet kicking a monotonous tattoo, while a gaudy-colored sale-bill, behind his head, reflected a halo about him. The long bench on the opposite side of the room had its full quota. Three others leaned back in their chairs with feet perched on the long wood box-stove which gave evidence of its age from the layers of burnt tobacco juice that had missed the ash-box in the front damper. With clouds of tobacco smoke curling in every direction, their re-told stories, punctuated with nods that had a significant meaning, among themselves, to the effect that, "If George Benson did not know, he should be told the old custom of opening up a hotel." During this time, George, with a far-away look in his eye, and feeling as much out of place as a dove in an eagle's nest, walked nervously from window to door, occasionally resting his elbows on the bar outside.

Finally, Big Jake, unable to stand the suspense any longer and shifting his chaw of tobacco said, "Well, boss, I're a-reckon, if you wish these boys to stand by you, it's about time you stood the house to drinks." George, although somewhat taken aback by Jake's abrupt manner, but having already heard of the custom, and wishing to show a friendly feeling towards them, apologized for his over-sight by saying that he had so many things to think about in getting settled, it had escaped his mind entirely. George, relieved that something had turned up to break the monotony he was suffering from, at once lifted the drop-door, which acted as a barrier in keeping those on the outside from getting too close to the attractively-laden shelves, contained so many favorite blends. Once behind the bar, he was as awkward as the proverbial bull in

a china shop, not knowing a bottle of good old Scotch from a bottle of pepper sauce that was kept to put the kick in dead beer. Under Jake's guidance, however, who not only knew every bottle but the colors of the labels upon them, everything was soon set. The glasses clicked and lips smacked as the new landlord's health was drunk with great gusto. These few minutes worked a masterful transformation, and now on each face a smile could be seen. When it was noticed, however, that George had failed to pour himself a drink, Slim Johnson reached around the counter for a glass and, pouring a liberal drink from a bottle labelled "Johnny Walker," handed it to him saying, "Come on, join the boys, you will find them a bunch of damn good fellows and real boosters." Time was to tell what this class of good fellowship meant, and who was to pay the piper.

Though not a teetotaler, this was the first drink George Benson had taken in public, outside of the wine that had been used at Communion in the little church. During this incident, Robert, who had been standing near a door leading to the hall, with a boy's curiosity and inquisitiveness, was enjoying the novelty of the excitement, but on seeing his father take this—his first drink—the thought given him in a recent temperance lesson, wrote itself on his mind in flaming letters of fire, "Look not upon the wine while it is red, for at the last it biteth like a serpent and stingeth like an adder." Could it be possible that his father had forgotten those words, or was it a case of "when you are in Rome, do as the Romans do?" This constituted the baptismal inauguration of The Beacon, after which tongues began to wag freely.

To both George and Mrs. Benson, the time from just after noon, when they had arrived, passed slowly, so that evening was very welcome until the increased inebriety, vulgar gossip and stories told in a licentious way, showed that the better instincts of manhood, seen earlier in the day, had now changed into what was boisterous and disgusting. As closing time approached, to which George was eagerly looking forward, the last quarters and dimes were fumbled from the drinkers' pockets to get a little "red eye" in a bottle, which was to act as a "morning glory" for them. Finally they side-balanced through the door to the open shed to get their horses (some without feed or covers had been standing from twelve to fourteen hours in the zero weather, shivering from the cold). In a hurry to get home the owners became engaged in a general mix-up, as sleighs containing boxes and

wood-racks were backed into each other causing the hilarious friendship of such a short time before to be replaced with venom and contempt, as the whiskey took full effect. In a few minutes coats began to fly and curses rent the air at the entrance to the shed, as the melee progressed.

Mrs. Benson, through sheer weariness and mental anguish from what she had already seen, which she endeavored to fit in with her inherent belief that everything worked out for the best when God's blessing was asked upon it, had gone to bed, but at the first sound from the shed she suddenly awoke. Rushing hurriedly to the window overlooking the yard she noticed Robert was already there. The change from the peaceful calm he had always known before had been so marked he had been unable to sleep and to satisfy his curiosity, he had been watching all that had taken place. Her first impulse was to order him to bed, so that he would not be contaminated with the rough language still being used. With the echoing curses growing louder on the still midnight air, she rushed down the stairway to her husband, who in the meantime, hearing the trouble, had proceeded to the yard to act as peacemaker. On coming into close proximity with a couple who were about to settle their differences with their hands, he came in the way of a heavy uppercut to the right jaw that sent him reeling backward. Having taken only the one drink, however, and being a strong, muscular man with iron-like muscles from hard work, he was quickly on his feet, and not to be taken off guard again, delivered a couple of knockouts to the two ring-leaders, that were the means of getting the situation in hand. As the others quickly took to their sleighs, the impetuous horses hurried them into the night, leaving only the sound of cheerful jingling bells, the charm of which mocked the bitter thoughts of George Benson as he returned to the hotel. If such disgusting behaviour by his clients was to be a regular thing what would the future hold?

Sick at heart, he closed the door behind which stood his wife, her first excited words being, "Oh, George, what will become of our children in this terrible place?" Then, with a wife's intuition, of how heavy his heart must be, the lines of worry that so clearly revealed her hidden thoughts gave way to her usual tranquil countenance. With several questions on domestic matters designed to take his thoughts away from their immediate trouble, she once again enshrined George and herself in the peaceful oblivion of a home founded on love.

Robert went to his room, where in child-like faith, he uttered

the prayer that had been taught him at his mother's knee, to which he added, "And, Oh loving Father, keep me from becoming addicted to strong drink, with all its evils, such as I have witnessed in these poor men, and I promise I will forever do Thy Will." Although he did not know that this promise meant even more than the ideas that had been formulated in his mind, which he had been taught at home and at church, still the promise was firmly implanted there and many times in later life, the memory of this picture and promise against the drink demon, made him a conqueror over trying temptations. "Train up a child in the way it should go, and when it is old, it will not depart from it!"

This was the first trial that introduced the Bensons to their new field of labor at Centretown. The days that followed were filled with many such scenes, some even more trying, but the first shock, however, was the hardest to bear. After a while the life became routine, except to Mrs. Benson, who never allowed a day's end to pass without, in the quiet of her own room, pouring out her soul to God, in sincere prayer, that in his wisdom and loving mercy, He would soon open up a way by which they could get out of the despicable business, which she claimed to her husband on many occasions, was nothing but a home-cheater. Many of their most-cherished ideals had now to be dispensed with, such as, family worship and grace at meals, which George fully endorsed, remarking, however, that necessity recognized no law. The last three hundred dollars from the sale of his stock and implements, George had been obliged to pay on the business, besides giving a mortgage for the balance, and signing a three-year lease on the place, so that there was but little else to do under the circumstances, but see it through, trusting that by the time the lease had expired, they would have sufficient money to go back on the farm where they had been so happy; but blind faith is too often the false God before whom the foolish worship.

The children, true to type, quickly assimilated the changed conditions, having a ready retort for all the jokes and remarks made to them by hotel clients. The humiliating part came at school, though, where their holier-than-thou-attitude, created by simple-minded egotism, caused them to be dubbed the rum-seller's children. This was the means of disqualifying them from many little parties and gatherings at the homes of other children. This is one thing that so pricks the minds of those of tender years that only they, who have experienced it, know how real the hurt can be!

CHAPTER 3

"Be loving, and you will never want for love; be humble, and you will never want for guiding."—
D. M. Craik.

IT WAS a month after the move to Centerton before Robert was able to again resume his studies at school, as his help was so badly needed in getting things in the home settled. His father's time was practically all taken up in looking after the bar, and attending to things in general.

During the opening exercises, when the teacher noted him as a new pupil, he was addressed and appointed to a seat. His eyes surveyed the other scholars, most of whom he had seen before around the streets or at the post-office; but now, they appeared in a different light, and strange feelings he had never experienced before came over him—first like the hot spasms of a fever and then a weakness about the knees. Subconsciously his hand came to his neck to see if his little bow tie was in place, and his mind became absorbed in the idea that he had not combed his hair. The reason for all this he seemed unable to comprehend, while his hypnotic gaze was directed across the room to a girl whose beauty held him to the spot like a great magnet, for the bright rays of the morning sun, as if determined to do their part, were reflecting the beautiful tones of reddish-brown in her hair. In addition she was the possessor of a pair of violet-blue eyes, twinkling like stars, set strikingly in her perfectly formed features. Her cheeks, like two red roses, radiated the bloom of health. Standing thus enthralled, her eyes met his gaze just as the teacher tapped bell and said, "Seats, please." In his state of mind, he acted mechanically in the manner he saw those in front of him do, his mind being so far in dreamland, however, that he didn't look to see where his seat was, which resulted in his trying to sit on the wrong side, where no seat was, thus landing on the floor! This at once caused roars of laughter from the scholars, while the teacher, trying to suppress her emotions, merely tittered, but it was some time before order could be restored. Meanwhile, Robert, crimson to the ears, was soon up and properly seated, and the morning lessons were brought to point of order. The occasional

snicker of someone, musing more on the incident than on the work at hand, had to be continually checked by the teacher, until losing her patience, she said, "The next one guilty, will be sent from the room and stay in at recess." In spite of it all, Robert still found his eyes going towards the girl, who had been the unconscious cause of his embarrassment.

The teacher, however, soon brought him back to earth by coming to his desk to go over the usual preliminaries necessary with a new scholar, pointing out to him the lesson and his class station. Shortly afterwards they were all called before the black-board for the arithmetic lesson. As they assembled, Robert was glad to see that two boys he had become friendly with, and three other girls, one of whom was the object of all his distraction, were in it. The lesson finished far too soon for him though, as it brought him near to the first girl of his dreams, allowing him to hear her soft, modulated voice answering the questions that were asked by the teacher. Once again, back in his seat, he had to think seriously before he could get into his mind what the lesson had been all about, as before his eyes passed in review pictures he had seen of figures in Grecian art, none of which had ever approached, in his judgment, the beauty of the girl who so fascinated him. To the sages, perhaps, this might be termed puppy love. But to Robert, it was ever to remain the awakening of man's greatest impulse, the love for a beautiful woman. The one responsible for this high tide of feeling was Mamie Boswell, the only daughter of the Methodist minister of Centreton, a most popular girl with all the young people, owing to her winsome ways and exceptional beauty.

Mamie was always the first in her class at school and organist for the Sunday school choir. But, what a gulf there was between them! In those days, for a minister's daughter to look with favor upon a hotel-keeper's son was an abomination that simply could not be tolerated by the "important" members of the church. Thus the first day at school was spent.

On the way home, a feeling of shyness overcame him; so without waiting to walk with the others, he hurried home to assist his mother while his brother and sister remained behind. George remarked to some of the other boys that he guessed Robert felt too cheap after sitting on the floor, to walk with them. Robert was soon busy with his accustomed duties, which gave him time for thought, most of which was now centred on his school work, and

which for some reason, not all together clear, had a new charm. On analysing it more closely, he knew it was the aura of Mamie's presence at school. What better way could he take to make her acquaintance than through playing a hero's part? Having seen her several times at the post-office, he knew that her retiring manner would prevent him taking the liberty of speaking to her in the same way he could to other boys and girls. He was also at a loss as to how it was that he had never been attracted to her before, having met her several times, but her toque and heavy coat had hidden her striking beauty apparently. That night, as he lay on his bed, coaxing sleep that would not come, his mind flooded with new thoughts and plans, several hours passing before those searing emotions could be sufficiently reconciled with his plans to allow sleep to take possession..

A new day brought a new vision. He now fully realized the meaning of his feelings. It was love. He must make plans to guard against becoming too sentimental, as he thought one who does not is usually looked upon as a soft fool. He would wait an opportune time, and for the present would be satisfied in creating a favorable impression, first by thoroughly becoming efficient in his studies. In this he was so successful that he headed the class after the second month, defeating the lady of his heart for the honors. This made such an impression that he soon noticed a marked difference in her attitude toward him. She commenced to make casual requests in connection with their studies. This inspired him so much that he gave extra special attention to his school work, so much so, that his parents could not help remarking at his excellent progress. The credit was, they felt, due to the teacher, quite unaware of the underlying current which motivated him. This inspiration was even responsible for his cheerful manner and willingness to assist in any work around the place.

To Mrs. Benson, it seemed strange that there should be such a difference in her children: Robert so willing and considerate; George so inconsiderate and careless in his habits, and Mary, at times, inclined to be lazy and selfish. However, she had too many worries to dwell on the thought, and she just dismissed the matter from her mind.

CHAPTER 4

"Religion is the tie that connects man with his creator and holds him to his throne."—Daniel Webster.

AS THE snow and frost of winter began to pass away giving place to the longer days of warmth and sunshine, many changes were felt in the Benson home. Many of the hotel's winter chair-warmers, who had been the cause of several brawls, now harkened to the call of the land and took positions for the summer so that the convivial but noisy days and nights of a few weeks ago now gave place to serene and peaceful times, inclining Mr. Benson to think that everything was probably going to work out for the best. There were several things to be thankful for; the opportunity for the children to get schooling, the nearby church, and above all, the financial returns sufficient to meet all expenses with a little over. So far, though, since coming to Centreton, owing to the duties of the business and a feeling that, as proprietors of The Beacon, they were not welcome to the church—although they had given to several of its funds—the Bensons had not attended very regularly owing to business duties and their feeling that perhaps a publican and his family were not wanted. From now on, it was decided they would arrange to go every Sunday, and that the children must attend the Sunday school regularly.

The Sunday following found the new ruling put into effect, although George Jr. found several excuses for not going, all of which were quickly overruled. The Sunday morning preparation of the Lesson seemed to bring back to them the spirit of the days they had so often enjoyed, for few things seemed to bring back the peace of mind, that religion did, to those brought up under its influence and belief that they were acting in accordance with the will of God. To George and Mary, the fact that they had learned the Golden Text and the Catechism questions perfectly, was not the most important, for both were going to wear their new shoes, a big event in every family in those days, when one pair per person, per year was the rule. To Robert it proved to be a day of humiliation and disappointment for he had taken particular pains in putting on his new blue suit,

and brushing his brown wavy hair to a turn. His eyes twinkled with expectancy, for he expected to meet Mamie in her father's church, she being the organist for the Sunday school choir. What better opportunity could be given? Beyond doubt, he thought he would receive a good old-fashioned welcome, followed by a friendly chat after service, and possibly, an invitation to dinner, a custom that was strongly adhered to in Mapleton.

With these cherished ideas, Robert, accompanied by his sister and brother, arrived at the school fifteen minutes before the opening exercises. Shortly after the Superintendent arrived and gave them a most pressing welcome. Robert, who was of a more sensitive disposition, was very thankful, and regretted that he had not started attending sooner. The school was soon called to order with the singing of one of the old familiar hymns, after which the classes were separated for lessons, and Robert was asked to unite with the young people's Bible class, composed of 'teen age boys and girls, and taught by the Superintendent, who was a man of sincere and noble ideals, and very conversant with the Scriptures. The half-hour lesson period seemed far too short, especially after Robert had spotted Mamie on a side seat with the other girls, presenting profile view, in which a new spring hat made her appear more attractive than ever. No wonder Time appeared to take wings.

Just at the height of his silent delight, the villian, to him, had to enter in the shape of Shorty Smith, the son of the blacksmith. He was a real type of his own, with freckled face, unkempt hair, the lace out of his shoe. Very popular with all the boys for his fearless manner in expressing what he wanted to say, and willingness to always help in rebuilding their wagons. He would even make miniature horse shoes to give them for good luck omens when they went to their pirate den. He was a natural-born mechanic. Sitting next to him during the Scripture lesson, he had given more attention to sizing up Robert's new suit than what the Superintendent had to say. Just as the lesson was concluded, he looked up into Robert's face saying, "Lord Bingo, where did you get the suit? Your old man must surely have been putting more cistern water in his whiskey." His guttural voice being very distinct, the class, as a whole, indulged in suppressed laughter that wore of in series of titters. Mamie and Marion, the store-keeper's daughter, who sat next to her, with set teeth and expressions of contempt, looked at Shorty in such a way as to make him sub-

side, while Robert's color heightened to a lurid red. He was undecided as to whether he should walk out, which would make him more conspicuous, and punish Shorty when he came out, or to ignore him for the present all together. The sympathetic look from Mamie was like balm to a wounded heart. Mamie reported to her father later that Shorty should be made to behave himself in Sunday school.

The exercises were followed by the church service, lasting an hour and a half, for which Robert remained in accordance with his mother's request. He heard but little of the sermon though, as his mind was busily employed in thinking what Shorty had said, and in what way he should retaliate. But was it not true that his father did sell whisky diluted with water? Outside of that, there was the question that the drink was valueless and caused both sin and trouble. Therefore, what defense could he make? Had he not witnessed the fruits of it? Had he not prayed never to become addicted to its use? No, he could not uphold it. Therefore, he must stand to be ostracized through a cruel, evil system of circumstances over which he had no control. But, if God loved and cared for his children here, why did he allow them to be placed in such a position as to be tempted to lose their faith? This was an evil thought and must not be harbored, for God's ways were not to be questioned. Still he could not forget the incident, and decided he would not go to Sunday school.

So when Sunday came around again, and the usual time approached for getting ready, Robert showed no signs of interest. His mother reminded him of the time, and he offered a number of excuses, none of which appeared acceptable. He then admitted the real reason. His mother, feeling as badly hurt as he, decided that in no way must he become a backslider from church. His father was drawn into the discussion, being given Robert's reason, but he remained for some minutes in silent meditation, as if too perplexed to know just what to say. Then, as if acting on inspiration, he grasped Robert's hand, and said, "Robert, my boy, I know how hurt you must feel with such an insult, which for the present you and all of us may have to bear as the Master accepted abuse when on earth, but, remember, that by faithfully attending your church, you will find that although you may not see all that leading a Christian life may mean, you will feel assured that your association with it will not only be helpful in moulding your life, but will never do you any harm." Whether it was the

words or the impressive manner in which his father spoke, Robert's mind became at once fully made up that whatever trial he would be called upon to bear, his father's advice would act as an anchor for his faith.

The subtle effect of balmy spring days soon had the brown earth covered with a mantle of green again, over which was heard the songs of mating birds and the musical drone of the busy bee, while from the old schoolyard rang a chorus of happy voices. These are the things which so often remain in the mind amongst cherished memories, and never-to-be-forgotten and everlasting friendships. In this way, the days brought Mamie and Robert closer to each other's friendship. At first a sly classroom glance, a borrowed knife to sharpen a pencil, the loan of a book or lesson help, then as friendliness increased, a verse of love, cleverly and slyly, was added, soon followed by longer love letters filled with impulsive messages.

Summer is the time particularly favored for picnics and outdoor parties, in which church associations vie with each other in making theirs the greatest success. The Ladies' Aid of Centreton, for a number of years, had held its annual picnic in the form of a Strawberry Festival at a most picturesque maple grove belonging to the Sunday school Superintendent, about two miles distant. As a matter of custom every one made it a point to attend the yearly picnic, no matter how rushed the work was. This annual gathering afforded an opportunity to discuss all the local events of the district, the crops, the neighbors' health and local business too. It was looked upon, also, as tendering support to the church. To the boys and girls, however, it meant a day of merry sport with a big line-up for pies and cakes that would make a modern banquet a joke, to say nothing of the big serving of strawberries and real cream. O for the good old days! Centreton Church picnics had always been a success, some giving the credit to the minister's popularity for he was ever a friend to those in need or whom he could help to lift up into spiritual life. Others shared the credit with the workers that were composed of a strong committee of the Ladies' Aid.

Whatever the reason, when the day came round, a continuous processions of horses in buggies, and teams in wagons, were to be seen making their way up to the clearing in the beautiful maple bush on a sloping hill that overlooked the village in the distance. Soon the cheerful spot, with its noise and playful chatter, gave one

a picture of Donnybrook Fair, and in addition, the big tables were loaded with good things to eat. Many had arrived early so that a long afternoon could be spent indulging one's own particular taste, so that by the time the sun had made its round to the west, everyone would have a fully sharpened appetite. The Ladies of the Society, not unmindful of this important part in the day's pleasure, had been busy decorating the tables, so that they were most attractive with the season's flowers, profusely showing from every point, while others enjoyed games or conversation. With the tables practically all filled, and with bowed heads in spirit of reverence, Rev. Boswell, in his usual appealing way of making everyone feel the sincerity of his words, asked God's blessing on the bountiful blessings he had provided for them, after which an old favorite hymn was sung, though many words were skipped by the children who were too busy contemplating how many pieces of pie they could eat. The happy members of the gathering then sat down with one accord to take their time in fully enjoying the fruit of their labors.

The committee, having arranged that members of the junior Bible Class would act as waiters, were served first, and while the finishing touches were being made on the other tables, were enjoying themselves with a few old-time games, one of which was The Farmer in His Den, in which Robert was called upon to play the part of the farmer. In the usual blindfolded manner as the jolly members circled round and round, and the lines, "The Farmer takes a wife," were sung, Robert reached out and Mamie was taken into his arms. Lifting the handkerchief from his eyes, he was the picture of embarrassment, because the others, knowing something of their feelings for each other, made it an occasion for jesting and merriment.

When this important part of the day's events had passed, the committee, the members of which were always responsible for the big end of the work, washing dishes and cleaning up, now took their places, while the men smoked, chatted or played horse-shoes. The children gambolled in sportive pleasure in games that appealed to their ages. Some of the older ones walked away in different directions as their fancy took them. These were couples mostly those in the 'teen age, who seemed imbued with the idea that "two is company, three a crowd." Among the number were Robert and Mamie, this being the first opportunity where such liberty of action could be taken without being noticed. The idea that came to their minds was to gather violets down by the silver

creek that threaded its way through the woods some half-mile distance, whither they at once proceeded by way of the pasture lane. So interesting did the conversation grow, that they never noticed the cattle and sheep homeward bound for their allowance of salt. There were so many things they wanted to say to each other that occasion had never permitted before. The first conscious effort to break the spell was when Mamie, on looking across the creek remarked at the beauty of the nook. Robert noted a fallen tree that bridged the passage, and suggested that they cross it. Mamie thought it would be lovely, and soon they were in its environs, and Mamie pointed to another fallen tree nearby as a place to sit, saying she loved watching the water rushing by as it reminded her of some poems she had read. Here, somewhat shyly at first, they seated themselves, while in the branches overhead, a curious squirrel chattered a welcoming note. Soon, in this delightful Elysium, Robert placed his arm around Mamie's waist and, as he did, her head, as if looking up into the trees, fell back to his shoulder. Whether it was the witchery of Nature or not, Robert never knew; he was only conscious of a thrill that seemed to penetrate the depths of him as their lips met in the first passionate fervency of love.

Moments passed and it was only the plaintive bleating of a sheep that had missed its mates, standing on the opposite side of the creek, which brought them to quick realization of their action. In shy confusion they looked at each other and then, turning, they noted the long shadows of another day drawing to its end. Three hours had passed since they had wandered off with the others. Quickly they returned to the picnic, only to find that a large part of the gathering had already departed, leaving only those who were responsible for seeing that everything was left tidy.

"Why, Mamie, where have you been?" asked Mrs. Boswell of her daughter, "I have been so worried these last two hours wondering where you could have gone." Mamie replied, in her usual quiet voice, "Oh, mother, after supper several of us went down to the creek to pick violets." Her mother interrupted, "And did you get any?"

"No, I think the sheep must have eaten or trampled them down," she answered. Robert, who stood by, as if at a loss to know just what to say, with a guilty look towards Mamie as she gave their excuse, thought, "The sheep are welcome to them all!"

CHAPTER 5

"You cannot find, I believe, a case in the Bible where a man is converted without God's calling in some human agency, using some human instrument."—Dwight L. Moody.

LIFE in small towns, cities or villages at the crossroads is much the same if one lives a clean life, for prejudice no matter what its foundation will break down before it. This was found fulfilled again in the case of the wholesome family life of the Bensons who, during the early fall, had been invited to take part in some of the organizations connected with the church. Mr. Boswell had learned of their membership at Mapleton, and the able manner in which they had taken part in the work. Mrs. Benson, having been first approached by the president of the Ladies' Aid at Centreton Church, and believing it to be a duty, at once associated herself with the work becoming one of its most active members in her spare time from the routine duties of the hotel.

At one of its early Fall meetings the Ladies' Aid decided that the membership of the church should be increased with so many young people in the neighborhood. It was suggested that they hold a revival campaign to be held in November if Rev. Boswell approved of it. Mrs. Benson expressed herself as being very much in favor of it, also in furthering the temperance work, which came rather as a surprise to the majority of the members who were at a loss to understand how she could be so emphatic in her statements when it would mean a direct loss to her husband's business. Had they known her innermost thoughts, they would have known that principles came before personal interests with her. She was a woman of vision and could see how many in the world would become victims of environment, and sooner or later slaves to the pernicious liquor-drinking habit. Mr. Boswell was quite in accord with their plans.

The few weeks soon sped by until the time of the revival and conditions seemed to favor them in this way, although damaging their pockets, owing to the recent harvest being one of the poorest the district had had in years. Prices had hit a new low

due to wars in other countries, making the minds of most of the people very receptive towards seeking spiritual help. By the time the meetings opened, the whole community had grown very enthusiastic. The ladies had been very active in looking after every detail to ensure its success, special music having been arranged among the members, so that when opening night came, everything appeared to have been done, except for the guiding hand of the one who was to conduct the revival. This had been left in the hands of Rev. Boswell, who, recognized the truth of the Bible injunction that "A prophet is without honor in his own country," had made arrangements for it to be led by the Rev. John Sweeny, D.D., from a distant city. He quickly gave evidence of Rev. Boswell's good judgment when he took his place on the platform. As the congregation beheld a large man of six feet of attractive personality and with an eloquent voice, which he could use in a most dramatic manner in comparing the true way of life to that of a life of sin. He had just enough Irish humor to ease off the point of any of his remarks which might offend the backslider. To hear him was to feel that one was sitting at the feet of a true apostle of God.

At the conclusion of the discourse the first evening, many of the listeners remained spellbound, so effectively had the Message been conveyed to them, showing how utterly useless was life when anchored only to things of the world, and when the saving power of Jesus was denied. The news of the meeting (without the aid of telephones) had travelled over the whole district before the next evening so that when the doors were opened, the spacious church was filled long before the appointed hour; for opening of the meeting. The revival having opened on Sunday, it was announced that the first altar call would not be given till Wednesday evening, so that each one would have a chance to search their hearts carefully and to realize how little life meant when Jesus' saving grace had not been accepted. The interest had reached such proportions by the Tuesday night meeting that it was announced that there would be an afternoon meeting Wednesday, for those coming from a distance. Still at the Wednesday evening service, standing room was at a premium. When the meeting was called to order, and a number of favorite old hymns were sung with great volume and gusto, everyone present had a feeling that a supernatural power was over them, and by the time the discourse of the evening was delivered, their minds were made so reciprocative towards seeing

the truth so clearly mirrored before them, that when the altar call was given, many of the oldest church members, who had been professing Christians for years, fell under the spell and thought they should be saved again. Few remained in their seats.

George Benson, who had locked up the hotel in order to attend the meeting, felt the conviction so keenly that he decided to give up the sinful business in which he'd been forced to secure a living, and wanted to assist at the altar then and there, but with the surge forward of the crowd he decided to put it off until another night. In that way he was actually giving the Devil his opportunity. The next day he considered the contemplated step from many angles, the most important being the material one, and now, of course, that overbalanced the high ideals he had held the evening before, with the result that the next evening altar call found him, with several others, in the back seats, a wilful sinner. Mamie, who had affiliated with the church under her parents' guidance, with several other girls, made a full consecration of service. Robert, who had attended every meeting, had a feeling that it would be mockery for him to consecrate himself and have Shorty Smith make a laughing stock out of him in front of his gang. However, if the time came that he felt fully convinced that it was his duty, he decided he would do so, in spite of any sneers.

The first week had passed, each evening seeing many new converts and each day less customers at The Beacon, until George Benson could plainly see that by the time the revival was over, his business would be nil, as far as the bar trade was concerned. What was he to do? He agreed, personally, with his wife in her enthusiasm for the success of the meetings. Still, honest opinions and religious scruples would not buy their daily bread, and had they not gone to The Beacon, there might have been times when they would have to go without, and no thought was more awe-inspiring than a hungry child crying for bread when there was none to give it. But again he felt that he was moralizing without taking into consideration the promises of God in His word of Truth. He remembered his disappointment as he realized his prayers had not been answered when he had had to leave the farm. His faith again became weakened. With these perplexing questions passing through his mind, this evening soon sped by, during which he decided to remain home from the meeting. His reverie, however, was soon broken by the return of Mrs. Benson who was in a state of great exultancy, until she noted the care-worn

expression of her husband's face. This caused her to defer speaking on the subject closest to her heart and she spoke cheerfully of little domestic affairs in an effort to distract his attention from the conflicting thoughts in his mind.

In her room that night, her earnest plea was for guidance in the matter of the manner in which they were now making a living. At the meeting next evening, the Rev. Sweeny announced that his subject for Wednesday evening would be particularly addressed to young people in respect of their duty towards God, and he was taking for his text the words found in the first Book of Peter, Chap. 5, v. 8, "Be sober, be diligent, for your adversary, the Devil, as a roaring lion walketh around seeking whom he may devour." The young people responded most faithfully to his appeal and practically two-thirds of the large congregation which greeted him was composed of boys and girls ranging from thirteen to twenty years in age. The service was opened by that grand old hymn, "Hold the fort, for I am coming," sung with such power and feeling that one could not help but think that such a triumphal assault could not fail to overthrow the powers of evil. The minister, in eloquent tones spoke of the terrors of Hell in contrast to the love that Jesus had shown when he left his throne in Heaven to become a man and die on the cross at Calvary to redeem mankind. The burning zeal of his words brought home the truth that failure to accept salvation now, meant being eternally lost and tortured with the damned. Robert, like many of the others, weighed every word in the scales of his reasoning until he had fully satisfied himself that self consecration was the right step to take. When the altar call was made, he was among the first to step out firmly, fully resolved to lead a Christian life.

After the service, with several others, he was made the recipient of kindly congratulations and warm welcome from the elder members of the church on the step he had taken. Mamie and her parents and his own mother were especially happy for him. He was at peace in his own mind and heart, convinced that he had done the right thing. He could now face the world against any odds, he felt. But once again the cruel hand of fate, that seems to take special delight in raising one up to high places in life, only to make one's fall the greater, intervened. On the return of the family to the living room, Mrs. Benson, who had noticed that George Jr. and Mary were not among those who had gone to the altar, at once asked them in her motherly way why

they had not done so. In reply she received a shock that she long remembered from George.

"Well, mother, I didn't see any use going up there, for I feel like Shorty Smith, who says, 'If you have to be scared out of Hell you will not likely be fit company for the saints in Heaven', and that's what Mr. Sweeny said he wanted to do for everyone of us tonight. So don't you think that will be the way with a lot of them whom he scared. I have always noticed that when a chipmunk is knocked off the fence while carrying a nut home, he likes to chase back to see whether he can find it and get the meat out of it." His mother was mortified at such an assertion. "You go right to bed, George" she said, "and don't let me see you with that Smith boy again, or I shall have to strap you severely." George replied, "Well, mother, I don't think he will care, for when I wanted to join his pirate band, he said they did not want any booze-sellers for they always lose their heads."

Robert, who had been an attentive listener to his brother's remarks, felt a wave of depression now passing over him. Could it be possible that he, who but an hour ago had such assurance and confidence, was now the victim of his own deception, and had his brother a greater courage than he, or was it purely indifference on his part? Would he be able to show the power of religion by his actions or only make of it a mockery? These questions he pondered with his mother, who assured him that it was but another snare of the Devil to lead him back from the path of righteousness. Meanwhile Mary and his father sat by with a faraway look that denoted perplexity.

During the balance of the revival many were awakened to a new interest in life. The closing night was fast approaching. A meeting of all the members was called to discuss in what form their appreciation could be shown to Rev. Sweeny for his untiring efforts in making it such a great success. The summary showed one hundred and ninety-six new converts added to the church roll by profession of faith. This placed the Centreton Church in a most enviable position in regard to its membership.

The night of the farewell, before an overflowing congregation, Rev. Sweeny delivered his parting message which he based on the words found in First Colossians, Chap. 16:13, "Watch ye stand fast in the faith, quit ye like men, be strong." Based on these words his arguments to support the need for holding fast to the truth, acted as re-inforcements to a beleaguered army. The

glorious service was closed by singing that favorite hymn, "God be with you till we meet again."

Like the calm which follows a storm, it was soon noticed that only about half the people that formerly came to Centreton weekly, now came only once in a while, except on Sundays to church. The all-night dances that had always been events to look forward to, by both old and young, and which were generally cheered up with several rounds of good hard cider, were no more, the long winter evenings now being spent at home in meditation and prayer. The chair warmers at The Beacon had so dwindled in number that only old Jake and Slim Johnson were left of the crowd. Who, many were heard to say, had become so case hardened, it would take a sledge hammer to pound any religious sense into their brains. The village as a whole, especially as the time came around for usual Christmas festivities, now bore the quiet and somber appearance of the changed condition.

However it was an actual fact that business was at a stand-still, some going so far as to say that the campaign had very little to do with it, while others thought it was responsible for this condition. The real causes were poor crops, bad prices and general depression. This didn't stop old Jack MacDuff saying that he had never seen a town worth two hoots that was run by a bunch of sanctimonious four-flushers. Henry Jones, who had kept the store and post office for twelve years, soon found his business had fallen off to a place where he could not afford to keep his clerk, Jimmy Hampton, who for the past three years, had made himself so popular with the customers, due to his genial disposition.

These days were also very trying for the Bensons for their business had now dropped so low that they were unable to meet their payments, and it continued to suffer during the winter months when ordinarily business would have picked up. When the first days of spring came round, and Robert realized that it would be necessary for him to leave school in order that he might give some assistance at home, he talked the matter over with his parents, and approached Mr. Jones to see if he wanted anyone to take Jimmy's place during the summer. Mr. Jones at once considered the matter. Finding it difficult to attend to both the post-office and store, and trusting that with Spring, business would again improve, he offered the position to Robert, who at once became as popular with the customers as Jimmy. Mrs. Benson was pleased, in a sense, at Robert's obtaining the position. His small wages would

be a help, but on the other hand, she was greatly disappointed, as for several years she had planned in her heart that he would be educated for the ministry. Still her faith was strong enough to believe that God would soon over-rule these difficulties, and that these dark days were but times of testing. About a month after Robert had entered the store, at one of the week-night meetings, he was asked by Rev. Boswell to act as church librarian to replace Mrs. Boswell, who had put forth her efforts in getting the library started with some fifty volumes. Robert found much pleasure in this work for it not only opened up a position for him in the church work, but gave him the privilege of conversation with Mamie on the merit of certain books and their authors, for up to this time, their feelings for each other had to be kept more or less a secret. In these days, the class of literature one read was supposed to give evidence of refinement and culture, while to be a professing Christian was the distinguishing mark of a lady or gentleman.

CHAPTER 6

"God is better served in resisting a temptation to evil than in many formal prayers."—Anonymous.

THE spring season passed with business continuing very slow, but the favorable growing weather of the later spring months soon had the dark cultivated fields turned into a striking green, whose beauty was enhanced by the stalwart pines and attractive maples that surrounded them. A few weeks later the perfume of flowers, sweet clover and fields of new-mown hay made once more such an appeal to the senses that the trying conditions and depression of the wintermonths were almost forgotten.

As the time for the annual church picnic again approached, every effort was put forth to assure its success, for now with the increased membership of the church, there were plenty of new members to call upon to make up the active committees. When the day arrived with bright sun and clear sky, many were at the grounds with their families long before noon. To Robert, however, it meant a certain disappointment, because he had been asked by Mr. Jones to remain at the post-office till six o'clock. This being his duty, he willingly agreed. To Mamie it caused considerable disappointment for, remembering so well the happy event of last year's picnic she had looked forward to this one with great anticipation. Not knowing the reason for Robert's absence, she became quite peeved. and her quietness and inactivity being noticed by her mother, she was asked to assist in the decoration of the tables.

Soon after supper Robert arrived and was greeted by many of the older boys and girls but, at the sound of his name, Mamie, in her make-believe spirit of being slighted, decided she would show him she did not care, so she did not make any sign, but after some of the girls had hurried away to get supper for him, she decided, knowing the facts, that she would change her mind and speak to him. As she approached him, he, at once, expressed his regret at missing so much of the sport, but with a business-like air said, "It was a case of the King's business first." As the younger members passed jocular remarks among themselves in

reference to their own doings at the picnic a year ago, Robert and Mamie were overcome with their own memories, remembering once more the thrills they enjoyed. Would it be possible, on this occasion, to visit the enchanted spot? How to get away without making themselves conspicuous before the eyes of their friends? That was the big problem. The idea at once came to Robert, that by joining in the games for a time, they could then feign fatigue, and steal away. The idea had no sooner come to his mind than it was acted upon. Robert rose and suggested that they join in some of the old time games with the others. Everybody approved, and at once took an active part.

This continued for about a half hour with great enthusiasm, when a breathing spell was suggested, affording the opportunity for several pairs to steal off with, no doubt, similar ideas to those of Robert. Soon he and Mamie were detouring around the Beaver dam and well on their way to the scene of last year's sentimental rendezvous. The time was so taken up with so many things they wanted to say to each other that little of the passing scene registered with them until they came to the top of a small hill. Here they beheld a picture of exotic charm for, over the winding roadway, leading down the hill, was a great archway made by beautiful maples from whose branches silver-throated songsters poured their songs of love, while further on, in the dell below, hedged in by rows of cedar, from whose foliage came a pungent refreshing odor, was a beautiful stream whose crystal water gurgling over stone and log in its mad rush to the sea provided music ethereal.

Soon the spot, that had now become so indelibly impressed in their minds, came into view and Mamie quickly raised her hand and tapped Robert on the shoulder as she said, "I tagged you last," and then scampered across the old log with the agility of a young rabbit, followed quickly by Robert. Both threw themselves down on the old log as he caught up with her. It was the same one they had sat upon a year ago. No sooner had they done so, than his arms were about her, and their lips met in a passionate kiss. Settling down together for a cozy talk about their future plans, Mamie disclosed that, if she passed her exams, that she would be going to the Collegiate at Metropole after the holidays, and, of course, she expected a letter from Robert every day. Robert then told her of his plans to enlarge Mr. Jones' business in the hope of having his salary increased. Conversation finally giving way to repeated seals of endearment, the time slipped away only

too quickly and it was with quite a start that they realized the day's end was fast approaching.

Retracing their steps back to the roadway, that led to the picnic grove, they arrived just as the first outline of the full-moon, soon to break forth, showed in the eastern sky. They found most of the picnickers busily engaged in saying farewell to the minister, Mamie's father, who endeavored to speak to each one personally. Turning round just as Mamie and Robert came in view, he hastened to meet them, as he said, "Well, Mamie, I thought you had gone home. We have missed you for such a long time." The heightened color on both their cheeks was enough, however, to stop further questioning on his part and when he had attended to a few minor details he invited Robert to accompany them home, Mrs. Boswell, having gone home earlier.

All of the Benson family had attended the picnic. Several friends remarked how exceptionally well Mrs. Benson appeared, but that Mr. Benson did not look like his former self at all, as he was now so morose, a sharp comparison to the joviality he had shown at picnics in other years before he had entered the hotel business. Mrs. Benson assisted in every way she could, firm in her belief that it was a Christian's duty, and to such a great extent, that her friends were unable to see behind the cloak which she was maintaining for the selfrespect of the family. They were quite unaware of the trials she was laboring under daily, in her child-like faith. Such was the refining price that had to be paid for Salvation.

George Benson, formerly a strong, robust man, full of self-confidence, was giving way under his trials and the social glass, that at first his would-be-friends had encouraged him to take, as a mark of friendship, had now become his constant companion. He now endeavored to offset his trouble and worry by imbibing so freely as to get drunk frequently. On several occasions of late, Mrs. Benson had to help him to bed, making excuses to those who inquired for him. George Jr. was obliged to take his place and was showing signs of following in his father's footsteps. This so increased her worries, that at time, the brave wife was almost beside herself with grief. Each day her faith seemed to give her new courage to carry on though, so that even Robert was kept in ignorance of the proceedings in his own home.

Two weeks had passed since the day of the picnic and each day saw more letters arriving at the Benson home demanding

payment for goods received during the past few months when business had been so low. One was received from a lawyer in the nearby town, advising that unless payment of account was made immediately, a writ would be issued and foreclosure proceedings taken. This merely added fuel to the fire of adversity that was daily consuming Benson's moral and physical stamina. To ease his mind from the worry that such letters created, George imbibed more freely than usual one morning, and soon reached the stage where his inflamed brain made him very quarrelsome. In order to unburden his soul, he went over to see Smith, the blacksmith. Here he spent the time chatting and telling of his troubles, and had just explained how those damn revival meetings had ruined his business, and that if something did not turn up soon, he would have to get out of town, when he looked through the door and noticed Rev. Boswell coming out from his home and down the narrow plank sidewalk. When he was opposite the shop, Benson stepped out and rudely accosted the minister. Mr. Boswell at first offered his hand in friendship, which was refused, as the drunken man said accusingly, "You are responsible for my business all gong to hell." Mr. Boswell at once, noting his condition, and seeing that it would be foolish to try and reason with him in this condition, offered some plausible excuses to try and get away, but as he did, Benson caught him by the shoulder and pushed him, following up with a smash to the jaw that sent the minister crashing to the ground. It had been done so quickly, that the blacksmith hardly realized what had taken place, being busily engaged on a delicate bit of welding at the time. On seeing Boswell get up with his face cut and bleeding, he rushed from the shop and threw his arms about Mr. Benson just as he was set for a second attack on the minister. He held him tightly and tried to reason with him, but as this only infuriated the drunken man the more, he finally took him home, while Mr. Boswell turned back to his home with a badly bruised jaw and a couple of small cuts. By the time the hotel was reached, all the fight was out of Benson and, as his senses returned, he felt he could not face his wife. Since he had no alternative, the blacksmith at once broke the news in as gentle a way as possible, so that she would not receive too great a shock.

After a short explanation, she grasped the significance of the situation becoming prostrated with grief. The shock adding to the strain that she had been under so long, now caused a nervous

breakdown that was to render her incapable of any effort for several months. As soon as Robert arrived home and knew of his mother's condition he hurried in to her, but felt ashamed and dumb-founded when he learned what had taken place. It seemed to him that during the short space of time since he had left home, in the morning, filled with the ambition to work and with dreams of the future, the whole bottom had dropped out of his life. He pictured what Mamie and her parents would think of such a despicable act, by his own father. What a hollow mockery it was to have high ideals in this life! How could God allow such things to befall those who loved and served him? Once more, his mother's words came to him, quoted from Psalm 94, V. 12, "Blessed is the man whom Thou chastenest, Oh, Lord."

Five days later a writ of execution closed the doors of The Beacon, and a sherriff's sale of the chattels was advertised. As neither Mr. or Mrs. Benson were in any condition to look after the intricate business, it at once devolved upon Robert to find some way to carry on. This, he felt, called for meditation and a prayer that he might be given wisdom to handle matters most beneficial to all concerned. He then went to Rev. Boswell to offer his humble apologies for his father's behaviour. The welcome he received, at once showed the forbearance and Christian fortitude of every member of the family, for although showing they were hurt, their sincerity and advice were sufficient to restore his confidence, giving him courage to meet the present emergency. After weighing matters carefully, Robert realized that it would be impossible to carry on with the hotel, and he also realized the necessity of getting his father away from the temptation that was dragging him down daily. It would be necessary, therefore, for him to give up his position in the store that he might get another home established for them all. With his plans formulated, he proceeded to the store the next morning, and with great regret on both sides he resigned from his position, as he needed more money to support his family.

While talking of Robert's future plans, it occurred to Mr. Jones that he had over-heard, a few days ago, of a neighboring farmer who had been injured in an accident, and now wanted some-one to work his farm. From what he knew he believed that there were two houses on the place, and if Robert wished, they

would drive out that evening, as soon as he could leave the store in charge of Marion. Robert eagerly welcomed the plan providing his father and mother approved. The idea was soon sanctioned by his parents, who now feeling depressed, were willing to do anything that would get them away from there.

Early that evening found Robert and Mr. Jones at the home of James Walker, the injured farmer. James was very pleased to find some one fully experienced to take over the work, as he had just been told by his doctor that he should not do any work for at least six months. The doctor had also recommended he move to town, where he could receive regular treatments. An agreement was then entered into, whereby Mr. Benson was to receive a fair wage for six months, and George, a small wage for the harvest, and also have the use of the smaller house across the road. This was so satisfactory that Robert felt things were being divinely opened up, and that his prayers were being answered. It gave him a brighter view of life. Each landmark on the way back looked much brighter than it did going out, as he contemplated the good news he had to tell his parents.

His next move was to write to Jimmy Hampton, with whom he had been on familiar terms, and who had written several letters back home telling of his success, and the big opportunities to be found in the great city of Demoralburg. This had been the source of considerable discontent among some of the local boys, who wanted their parents to let them go there. To Robert, it was almost a necessary move. His wages were not large enough to pay his board and have anything left. Besides, he felt now Mamie would soon be leaving and all that remained would be delusive memories, that he did not want to stay. His aggressive spirit seemed to say, "This is the quickest way to the goal of success." His letter, therefore, stated that he would leave right after harvest, because he felt that he should remain to see his parents properly settled. He decided to write again later telling Jimmy the date of his arrival.

A few days later, the sale of furniture was held, but little cash was realized for, owing to the sympathetic feeling that prevailed among their friends, many refrained from attending the sale. To Mrs. Benson, however, it meant parting with many things which sentiment had made dear. It was impossible to retain them even, though they were so valueless to others, for even the few paltry

dollars were needed. When the creditors had received their due with all the added expense, there was nothing left to show for all their years of hard work.

With a feeling of sorrow and regret hanging like a heavy cloud over her mind, the family took a farewell view of The Beacon, the place that had brought them so many trials. They seated themselves in the democrat, drawn by a heavy farm team, sent in for them by Mr. Walker, and were on the way to their new home, reaching it just as the last rays of the setting sun pierced the western horizon.

CHAPTER 7

"There is not a heart but has its moments of longing — yearning for something better, nobler, holier than it knows of."—H. W. Beecher.

ROBERT, for some time, felt the change in his life keenly. He recalled vividly meetings with Mamie at the store, occasional walks as far as the cemetery, and especially in the church work in which he had taken such an active interest. Still, he was determined to adjust himself to the new conditions so that he might take his part in securing the family's happiness.

As Centreton was ten miles distant, it was too far to walk or take a team that was working all week. It was, therefore, found impossible to continue as members of the church there, and the only other one nearby held its services at the schoolhouse, two miles distant, under the supervision of the Presbyterian Church, the pastor from Midale driving over to hold the service every two weeks. It required considerable thought on the part of Mrs. Benson to decide whether or not to join the congregation, having always been told that the Presbyterians were pretty liberal in their views, not even condemning drinking, smoking or dancing. Still believing it was her duty to keep the family under the supervision of the church, she decided as soon as her health improved (which was restored much sooner than expected, due to freedom from worry, rest and the invigorating air consequent upon leading a more outdoor life) that she would visit the school, and if the truth was properly taught they would go regularly. Two weeks later she made her first visit. Her impression, however, both of the teaching and the friendly manner in which they were received, was enough to make her become one of the most active workers.

Conditions in Centreton moved along in their peaceful way. The Beacon had a new tenant, but the gossip that for a time had centered round the Benson trouble was almost forgotten. The school closed, and with Robert gone, everything seemed to have lost its interest for Mamie, for now in place of the hurried rush after school to wait for the mail to be sorted, she acted so indifferently to the type of affairs in which she had so recently taken

so much enjoyment, that her parents could not help but remark on her changed manner, not dreaming of the real cause, as they noted her preference for staying at home and reading to attending church service to which she had always been accustomed. The mail went to the post-office at Oakdale, by a circuitous route. It required three days to reach it, so that it meant she and Robert were only able to exchange one letter apiece each week as the post-office was then two miles from his home. Thus, the time dragged slowly by until she learned that she had passed in her exams. The thought of getting away to college in three weeks gave her new initiative to purchase her clothing and make everything in readiness.

Her last Sunday at home was soon at hand. As it was the end of the harvest season, she sent Robert a letter asking him to spend it at their home. But as there were no horses to drive, it meant a long tiresome walk for him and he was obliged to be up early in order to make the trip in time to attend the Sunday School at ten. This he wished to do that he might meet many of his old friends. Needless to say he was there in good time, and was received in a most cordial way by all the members who at once made him feel at ease. Somehow he had a haunted idea that some reference would be made to what had taken place in the past. When Mamie and her mother made their appearance, the happiness in her eyes showed to his reciprocative mind the unbounded pleasure that his presence brought. They met with such a warm greeting of welcome. The school was called, and the old familiar hymns were sung again with such feeling and inspiration, that the Superintendent commented on the singing and asked that they sing them over again.

Service over, a hurried luncheon was then served to allow Mr. Boswell to get away to his afternoon appointment. After this Mrs. Boswell had the opportunity of taking part in the general discussion, in which she stressed the fact that Mamie was going to college, and how lonesome they were going to find it. Robert not only agreed to this by his words, but his looks and attitude showed how depressing the thought was to him. For the first time, Mrs. Boswell became fully awakened to the truth that parents so often overlook, in failing to realize that their children do grow up and their hearts can become susceptible to the darts of Cupid. Now she suddenly knew the meaning, hitherto unrevealed, of many of Mamie's actions and why she had wanted to have Robert visit them before her departure. Robert imparted to them his decision to go to

Demoralburg, having received a letter from Jimmy Hampton telling him of its many opportunities. Mrs. Boswell expressed her surprise at his intention, now that they were so comfortably settled on the farm. He explained that his father and George could look after the work nicely, and added that they were not certain that Mr. Walker would want them after the six months was up. In this way, the afternoon passed, till Mamie, noticing that it was four-thirty suggested to Robert that they go for a walk.

Once out on the road, the golden gleam from the fields of bright stubble set off by the hills and stately trees in the background, was impressive as a great panorama unfolding before their eyes, with the blue haze in the distance, hanging like a great curtain to hold back the advancing days of Fall. No sooner had they turned up the road leading towards the grove their conversation at once turned to their personal affairs, in which they became so absorbed, that they had again reached their trysting place before they knew it.

If possible, Nature seemed to have added to its charms; the white flowers of June had now given way to those of a golden yellow; the chirp of the cricket had replaced the chorus of the frog; the mellow fragrance of ripened grain, that of new-mown hay; the busy bee, homeward bound, quickly sought the nectar from the heart of the flowers and hurried on. For a time both sat as if too enthralled to speak, or think of the joy that flooded their hearts. Gathered into Robert's arms, Mamie looked at him with such a soul-stirring gaze that it required several kisses, and caresses, to bring her out of the reverie that had come over her, before she entered into a conversation concerning her college future that was of interest only to themselves. On the morrow the train would take her to a new environment amidst the life and excitement of a great city, where new ideals could easily be formed, but one thought now clung to her mind, "Was she going to have courage to part from the one by her side, whose loving friendship, she knew, had made such an impression on her life?" Spanish castles were built by both of them, and were made to appear so real that nothing remained but to walk in and take possession of their exalted glory. Robert had not forgotten, however, how quickly such castles, built on their last visit, here, had been shattered by unforeseen circumstances, which he was now on the point of mentioning. As if sensing the idea in his mind, Mamie kissed him on the cheek in the most fervent manner. Promise after prom-

ise was made in all the sincerity that youthful minds, full of optimism and lacking the experience of life, are capable of conceiving. Time was forgotten, as well as the supper hour, for now nothing else must interfere with the one grand thought of their-all-absorbing love which they vowed for each other—to be held each in the other's keeping, until they could, before God, be united in the bonds of matrimony for life.

Remembering things mundane, they were startled to realize how time had passed, and thinking of Mrs. Boswell they made a quick departure and were soon home. There they found both Rev. and Mrs. Boswell anxiously wondering where they could be, and what was delaying them. Both of them were quick to tell how they had walked out to the grove and, being such a lovely evening, they had never thought of the time passing so quickly. Under the circumstances, this called for no further comment. Supper was then served and afterwards another pleasant hour was to be spent before Robert started on his long walk home. This plan, however, was to give way to another. Mrs. Boswell had decided that they all go to church, and she was so earnest in her request there was no other way out.

The next hour was spent in listening to Rev. Boswell give a most able sermon, speaking on the Fatherhood of God, followed by prayer in which special reference was made to those who now must set out in the world amidst its trials and temptations. At the conclusion of the service, Robert was again invited to return to house, Mr. Boswell offering to drive him part of the way later, but Robert, knowing that his horse had already had a long drive, made light of the walk ahead. Mamie insisted that he come to the house, and at once he accompanied them back. A half hour later, as he was taking his farewell, Mamie suggested walking as far as the school with him. The school was soon reached but the farewells, however, simply just would not come. They stood by the gate each hating to say the first goodbye. Finally Robert, realizing it was late for Mamie to be out alone, quickly embraced her, and kissing her tenderly, said, "Good-bye, sweetheart, don't forget that letter." With a sharp turn, he was gone, not even daring to look back for fear his resolution would be broken.

The following morning, as the bright days of the September sun shone through his window, Robert first awakened to his mother's summons to the breakfast she had kept waiting for him. As he ate it she made many inquiries about the Centreton people, especi-

ally Mr. and Mrs. Boswell and Mamie, and she didn't fail to notice his heightened color when he told her of Mamie leaving to attend college at Metrople.

"That is just lovely," she commended, "she has always been such a bright girl in her studies. I am quite sure she will make a name for herself, but it will probably be very lonesome for her mother and father as she's always been such a home girl and companion to her mother." Just then in walked George, his brother, who seeing him at the table, said quickly, "Say, Robert, if you have enough pep to walk to Centreton to see that Sis of yours, you can bring a little of it into action now and finish up the balance of your chores, which I have been doing. When you finish, father left word for you to go down to the east field to help him bring in the rest of that stack of hay; you will pretty near have to shake yourself if you are going to get out there this forenoon." Robert laughed as he replied, "Alright, brother, we shall be there." Without further delay, he was soon on his way to the field with fork in hand, taking a chance on George's finishing the chores, which he knew was all he had to do.

The next few days saw several of the odd jobs finished connected with the winding up the harvest. When Saturday came Mary went over to the post-office, as this was the day that the weekly paper and the "Christian Intelligencer" came. To-day there were also two letters, both addressed to Robert.

When she arrived home it was supper time, and the men had just sat down to eat. Mr. Benson's strength had returned almost completely by now, due to regular hours, freedom from worry and the fresh exhilarating air of the fields. As Mary entered Robert looked up expectantly just as she volunteered, "Two letters for you, Robert, one from Mamie Boswell, she sure don't lose any time in writing." Robert, under the family's eye, was somewhat embarrassed, but George, in his impulsive way, cried out, "Give them to him so that he can rip them open, and tell us all how little Mamie is getting along in the big city. I'll bet she is like a fish out of water." Robert was too engrossed in Mamie's letter to answer him, but he designed to announce that she had arrived safely and had enjoyed the trip.

He then proceeded to open the other letter, which he recognized was from Jimmy Hampton. Jimmy wrote that he was pleased to hear again of Robert's intention of going to Demoralburg. If he knew a few days beforehand he would be on the lookout for a job,

so that Robert would be able to go to work at once. He would also meet him at the station. Robert's face brightened for he considered that the opportunity that was opening up before him was a direct answer to his prayers. His mother, who had particularly noted the glowing expression on his face, asked, "More good news, Robert?" He then told them about the correspondence with Jimmy Hampton before they had left Centreton, and that Jimmy had now written he would look for a job for him and that he thought his chances for making a living there were excellent.

The proposition was then discussed from many angles. His father finally agreed that it looked good, and if he had a chance to learn a good trade, he would not want to keep him back from doing so, as he felt that with George's help, he could easily look after the work on the farm, even if Mr. Walker did not come back, which, of course, was debatable. His mother, with the prescience that can foresee possible trials and pitfalls, was reluctant to give her sanction. She thought that perhaps Mr. Jones' business would be large enough now to enable him to pay Robert a larger salary, and he would be near home in case of sickness. She felt Robert had proved, during the past year, through his help and good judgment how much he meant and could mean to them, if he stayed. If he went away so far, it would seem as if he was gone out of their lives entirely. Then she thought to herself that this was a selfish attitude to take and should not enter into the matter. At last she gave her consent to his leaving in saying, "Robert, it is possibly in your interest to go, and as you have always been a good boy, in whom we can put our implicit trust, it is perhaps best that you go; but, if you do not like the place, you can come back." Robert had hardly expected this. As he embraced her he said, "Thank you, mother, I will try and live up to your expectations."

That evening he wrote Jimmy, so that the letter could be given to the minister next day, ensuing quicker mailing. In it he advised Jimmy he would leave the following Friday.

The next day being Sunday, the family attended church, and it was while Mrs. Benson was under the influence of the exposition of Bible truths and supplication, that she pondered once again the wisdom of giving her consent to Robert's leaving home. She felt that surely there was some way whereby the family could be together for a few years longer, and she felt also that she must not allow herself to be forced into something that she knew was wrong just because there was nothing else in sight. It might be

God's will, and if so, had He not promised in His Holy Word, to be a Father to the fatherless? Therefore, her boy would be safe in His hands. This gave her courage, and a feeling of peace in her heart, so that she took special pride when service was over in making known to her friends that Robert was leaving for the city on Friday. They showed their kindly feelings with congratulations and warm handshakes, expressing wishes for his success. The few remaining days passed quickly, but not before Mrs. Benson had carefully prepared his meagre wardrobe, by mending and repairing everything he was going to take.

Friday morning broke with bright rays of September sun, driving before it the mist and heavy dew that was obscuring the horizon, and bringing warmth and cheer to what otherwise, was a cold, dreary morning. George was up early, attending to the chores, while his father had the team and everything in readiness for the trip. His mother added the finishing touches to his lunch, so profusely filled, that Robert, noting the size of the box, said, "Well, mother, I hope the trip doesn't last till I have finished off that box!" Everybody joined in the joke. Everything was now in readiness for the start, but the trial of saying good-bye had to be faced by them all. Surprising him with a smile such as he had not seen on her face since they had come to Centreton, his mother placed her arm around him, and kissing him said, "The best of good luck, my boy, for I know God will be with you." Then Mary in her shy sentimental way, followed her mother, saying, "You won't forget to write us every week?" George, in a manner all his own, but with a sincere handshake, said, "Good-bye, old top, and don't forget I shall have to do all your chores!" Stepping into the democrat beside his father with one last wave, Robert was gone.

CHAPTER 8

"Assurance of hope is more than life; it is health, strength, power, vigor, activity, energy, manliness and beauty."—J. C. Ryle.

THE TEN miles to Centreton was soon made, and reaching it Robert took time to say good-bye to his friends, his former employer, Mr. Jones, and the Rev. and Mrs. Boswell, who hoped to hear of his success often. Once more they were on their way, now climbing the long hill that overlooked Centreton, and which led past the grove. Looking back, so many familiar scenes flashed vividly before his mind, that the monumental description Goldsmith gave so beautifully in the "Deserted Village" was most graphically portrayed before him, as he felt the thrill of each scene playing before his eyes:

Sweet Auburn, loveliest village of the plain,
Where health and plenty cheered the laboring swain,
Where smiling spring, its earliest visits paid,
And parting summers lingering blooms delayed.
Dear lovely bowers of innocence and ease,
Seats of my youth where every sport could please,
How often have I loitered o'er the green,
Where humble happiness endeared each scene:
The sheltered cot, the cultivated farm,
The neverfailing brook, the busy mill,
The decent church that topped the neighboring hill,
The Hawthorn bush with seats beneath its shade,
For talking age and whispering lovers made;
How often have I blessed the coming day
When toil remitting lent its turn to play,
And all the village train from labor free,
Led up their sports beneath the spreading tree,
While many a pastime circled in the shade,
The young contending, as the old surveyed.
Sweet was the sound when oft at evening's close,
Up yonder hill the village murmur rose;
There as I passed with careless steps and slow,
These mingling notes came softened from below.
The swain responsive as the milkmaid sung,

The sober herd that lowed to meet their young,
The noisy geese that gabbled o'er the pool,
The playful children just let loose from school,
The watch-dog's voice that bayed the whispering wind,
And the loud laugh that spoke the vacant mind.
These all in sweet conclusion sought the shade
And filled each pause the nightingale had made.

But with the changed conditions of the past few months in mind, the charm of those endearing memories faded into these lines:

But now the sounds of population fail,
No cheerful murmurs fluctuate in the gale,
No busy steps the grass-grown footway tread,
But all the bloomy flush of life is fled;
All but yon widow'd solitary thing
That feebly bends beside the splashy spring,
To pick her wintry faggot from the thorn,
To seek her nightly shed and weep till morn.
She only left of all the harmless train,
The said historian of the pensive plain,
Far different from all that charmed before
The various terrors of that horrid shore,
Those blazing suns that dart a downward ray
And fiercely shade intolerable day;
Those matted woods where birds forget to sing,
But silent bats in dusty clusters cling,
Those poisonous fields with rank luxuriance crown'd,
Where the dark scorpion gathers death around,
Where at each step the stranger fears to wake
The rattling terrors of a vengeful snake,
Where crouching tigers wait their helpless prey,
And savage men more murderous still are they,
While oft in whirls the mad tornado flies,
Mingling the ravaged landscape with the skies,
Far different these from every former scene,
The cooling brook, the grassy-vested green,
The breezy covert of the warbling grove,
That only sheltered thefts of harmless love.

Mr. Benson, noting his son's intense contemplation, as they ascended towards the peak of the hill, remarked at the beautiful view. Robert replied, "Yes, it is a scene that deeply impresses itself on my mind, and as I was watching it enlarge with each rise of the hill, I could not help but visualize that beautiful descript-

ive poem of Goldsmith's, "The Deserted Village." Oh, how a few changed conditions can make it so different in retrospect!" This at once brought his father's mind back to some of the lines he also remembered, and he said, "Yes, and as I look back myself, these lines most fittingly express what I have felt and seen." He then recited these few lines:

Those poisonous fields with rank luxuriance crown'd,
Where the dark scorpion gathers death around,
Where at each step the stranger fears to wake,
The rattling terrors of a vengeful snake,
Where crouching tigers wait their helpless prey,
And savage men, more murderous still are they.

As he finished, Robert could not help but realize how keenly his father had felt the stigma of his experience with drink, and said to express his sympathy, "But, father, these things are now behind, and we can feel we have made the turn to peace and success." By this time they had reached the crest, from where Robert could get a good view of the two large maples that stood before the Boswell home. This brought tender memories of Mamie to mind and a deep longing for her filled his heart. When would he see her again? Still, he thought, in a while when success had blessed his efforts he would return as a hero to enjoy the thrill of claiming her as his dear wife. Such is the shrine of optimism at which youth worships, till old man experience kicks out the pedestal from under it.

Soon the small station came into sight, but here they learned that the train was not due for an hour. They unhitched the horses, tying them to a nearby tree to feed, and seating themselves in a sheltered spot, were soon doing ample justice to the fine lunch Mrs. Benson provided. They were deep in a discussion as to which trade would be best for Robert to follow when the train's whistle in the distance gave notice of its close proximity. The train pulled in, Mr. Benson caught Robert's hand in his as he said, "You have been a real son to me and you are now leaving home. It is not necessary for me to ask you to remember the real foundations for success in life, but God bless you and give you success, and always remember that, success or failure, a father's and mother's love awaits your return." Robert could hardly stifle the rising lump in his throat sufficiently to say, "I know, I know," before the grinding brakes brought the train to a stop and he had

swung aboard. A moment later, he was gone, as if snatched up by the speeding hand of time. His father walked towards the team with tears trickling down his face so profusely that it seemed as if the very fountain of his soul had been opened. However, with the assurance that faith gives to the mind, he was soon comforted and returned home.

The journey necessitated an hour's train travel, and then an eight-hour trip by boat. When he reached the boat, it seemed but a few hours before since he had watched the waters of the lake lap the shores of their farm, so close were thoughts of home to him still. Being tired from the day's excitement, Robert spent most of the trip sound asleep, till the noisy vibrant notes of the siren awoke him. Arriving on deck he soon discovered that the ship was pulling in to his destination. Gathering up his grip and lunch-basket he was soon one of the excited crowd walking down the gang-plank. Reaching the dockside he kept a sharp look-out for his friend, Jimmy Hampton, but failing to see him after scanning the crowd of people gathered to meet their friends from the ship, he decided to go into the waiting-room and stay until he showed up, thinking he had probably been detained.

As Robert was about to enter, a man with a shifty look in his eyes, stepped out from behind a post and in a smooth voice said, "Looking for someone, stranger?" When Robert replied in the affirmative, he entered into a friendly conversation, offering to take him up to the city, as he was on his way there. Robert recollected that he had forgotten to bring Jimmy's address, and feeling confident that he would come to meet him as he had promised, declined the offer, at which the stranger, thinking him to be a country hick, mistook his courtesy for weakness, and became somewhat insistent. He took hold of his grip as if to grab it from him. Robert again told him firmly that he was not going; the stranger made a move to jerk it from him but Robert, having a good hold, quickly dropped his lunch-basket from his right hand, and landed it heavily on the stranger's jaw, making him reel backwards. Robert was prepared to repeat the dose, if necessary, but the stranger rose quickly, rubbed his cheek and disappeared in the darkness. He then went into the waiting-room to await the arrival of his friend, but it was several hours before he made his appearance. In fact, the first grey streaks of dawn were showing across the sky when the door opened, and one, whom Robert thought resembled Jimmy, entered the room, peering around. Robert was

not certain enough to approach him, as, if this was Jimmy, he was greatly changed. The fresh boyish lad of a year ago had given way to a bloated, dissipated looking, heavy adult. His clothes now were loud, characteristic of the lounge-lizard type. Sighting Robert, he at once rushed over to him with the same gesture of friendliness that had made him so popular back home. He expressed his regret at being late, explaining that a special meeting of his club, of which he was chairman, was the cause. Robert accepted this at its face value, having yet to learn the meaning of white lies and city intrigue.

However, he then took his grip and engaging a cab directed the driver to take them to his room. The conversation about things back home kept both so interested, that the long trip appeared to have been covered in no time. Nevertheless Robert received the impression that there was something different about Jimmy, a false ring. Being charitable he put it down to his own innocence of city ways and ideas and let it go at that. Upon arrival at his room which was located in a fashionable residential district, Robert was instructed to make himself at home. Jimmy at once prepared a light breakfast that both enjoyed, especially some of the home-made cookies Robert had brought with him. He departed, apologising for hurrying away to work, and asking Robert to go to bed and have a good rest, till noon hour, when he would call again.

He had no sooner laid his head on the downy pillow, when he was fast asleep, unconscious of all the things in the new world round about him. In his sleep he dreamt that he was back home, looking into the face of those he loved, again hearing his mother's morning call. Suddenly, the feeling of someone's fingers passing through his hair, caused him to turn over. He was just about to say, "George, cut out the nonsense. when a pleasant voice said, "Are you never going to get up, Dearie?" This made him open his eyes with a start, only to look into the face of a beautiful woman, with smart coiffure of blonde hair, and attractive blue eyes now looking into his. Robert thought that no doubt she was the lady of the house, who had come to make up the room, and that he had mistaken what had been said. Offering his apologies for being in bed, he explained how it had all happend. His listener showed a pleased interest, remarking how pleased Jimmy would be to have a friend from home with him, then said that as he was a friend of Jimmy's they too would be friends. She introduced herself as

Jessie Cooke. Then left the room while Robert dressed. A few minutes later Jimmy arrived his appearance much improved since the morning. On seeing Jessie he greeted her so cordially that Robert was at once given the impression, that she was his fiancée. He was about to introduce her to Robert, as he came out of the bathroom. She then explained they had met and the shock she received finding a stranger in his room. At that, they all joined in a laugh. Jimmy then decided they should all go out to a restaurant for lunch. A happy conversation was carried on during the meal, and Robert soon felt much at home in Jimmy's winsome friend's company, thinking he noted a desire on Jimmy's part to speak with her privately, he made his apology of wanting to return to the room, but Jimmy said, "Don't be in a hurry, Robert," then pulling out his watch and noting how the time had passed, "Well I guess its time for me to be getting back. You had better take a walk around and see some of the city this afternoon, and we will meet at the room at six thirty and go out for dinner together."

Robert acted accordingly walking up one street and down the other, looking over many of the larger buildings and stores, reading the numerous signs, and deeply speculating as to which one he would find employment. By the time he returned to the room, he was beginning to feel at home. The people looked a little different from those back home; some wore much better clothing, and some worse, but the most marked thing that drew his attention was the generally aimless hurry of everyone. These were the impressions he made known to Jimmy as they were once again seated in a fashionable cafe. Then he asked, "Which church do you attend?" Jimmy answered with a laugh, "Oh—the one around the corner." Not grasping the significance of the remark, he was looking forward to a visit there, on the morrow, Sunday. Dinner being served, the conversation once more drifted to the doings of all the boys and girls they had known back home, but when Jimmy asked, "Is old man Boswell's daughter, Mamie, as priggish as ever?" Robert at once felt a touch of resentment but on thinking it over, he decided that it must have been due to some slight she had given him. He merely suggested that he had never noticed anything to make her so and let it go at that, as Jimmy contented himself by remarking, "Oh, I guess she was all right in her way."

Suddenly he said, "Well, Robert, how would you like to spend the evening?" to which Robert replied that, as he had nothing on

his mind, he would leave it to him. "If there are any meetings on in your church, though, I would like to go there." Jimmy with a broad grin, replied that he thought there was a prayer meeting, at which both put on their coats and went towards the street. After a half hour's walk they came to a large building, illuminated by many lights over the front, some of which, in colors, spelled out the name, "Palm Gardens."

As they approached the inner door, a feeling of curiosity came over Robert as he wondered what church would have such an odd name. By this time they had passed through the door, and here the scene soon showed him that it was no church or religious organization, for at the end of a long room was the accursed bar, behind which were several puffy-faced men with diamond studs, or imitation sparklers glowing from the front button-holes of their shirts. They wore white aprons, and dried glasses as they puffed smoke from big cigars, all the while surveying themselves in the mirror behind. On each side of the spacious room there were numerous small tables with three or four small chairs, on which were seated young men and women, mostly couples, sipping from huge glasses with handles on them. From the stale smell of the place, Robert knew it was beer. While clouds of stale tobacco smoke floated in clouds towards the ceiling, Jimmy led the way to a side table. Robert followed him, becoming so absorbed in the strangeness of it all that he stumbled over a table, which was a source of much amusement to some who had seen him enter and noted his wide-eyed curiosity, to them it was quite evident his first visit! As Jimmy threw himself into a chair, the censorious look Robert gave him seemed to say, "Well, what are you going to do here?" As it is an age-old idea for boys from the country (who no doubt know how they felt themselves) to want to see such a look in their friends' eyes, they take a special pleasure in showing the highlights of the city to their unsophisticated friends, instead of showing them places that would be much more appreciated. No sooner had they become seated, than a dissipated-looking waiter, set down two of the long glasses of beer, the sight of which made Robert turn away in disgust. As Jimmy paid for them, Robert felt that it might be going a little too far to toss it into a cuspidor. As he hesitated, two rather comely girls, with good figures, dressed in short, flashy red skirts with low-cut blouses, came along and flippantly said, "Well, boys, are we going to join you?" Jimmy at once replied, "Why, yes, dears, sit right in." Signalling

to the waiter, two more long goblets of frothy beer were soon placed before them. The girls soon began talking, one to Jimmy, the other to Robert. Jimmy, being quite at home, was soon in a jolly mood, while Robert, if his looks expressed his feelings, felt more like a frog on an iceberg. The painted miss, however, was equal to the occasion, and at a wink from Jimmy, at once proceeded to try and put him at his ease, though actually increasing his discomfort. She acted in such an endearing way with one arm almost around his neck, as she sat on his knee, kissing him on the cheek that he was completely taken back. He had never seen or even heard of a girl acting in this way, and was at a loss to know just what to do. However, seeing Jimmy wink at the girl in his arms, he at once knew that they were having a laugh at his expense. He decided to see it through if it did not go too far, by playing up to them showing them that everyone from the country wasn't a hick. The glass of beer was held to his lips several times with endearing entreaties to partake of its invigorating qualities, but Robert refused, saying that he could never drink beer, till finally an opportunity presented itself for him to empty it into the cuspidor. His affected partner made every appeal in which she was so well-versed, leaving but little to the imagination to gain his physical love. After he had gone through three hours of this agony, during which the others had drained their glasses several times, Robert finally decided he would not throw any of his money away on such evil stuff for it had soon began to show its devilish effect on the others. As the need of fresh air and a place to lie down for Jimmy was demonstrated, it was decided to finish up the party but not before he'd made several promises to return Monday night and take the girls to a show. Thus, Robert had his first introduction to city life.

Few words passed between them on the way home, Jimmy having passed the stage where conversation was of any interest. Meanwhile, Robert was turning over in his mind all that he would say to Jimmy the next morning for taking him to such a place. But for the present, a good night's rest would be Nature's greatest cure for hurt feelings and revenge. When morning came, or rather the later forenoon, Robert, who had been lying awake for sometime, felt Jimmy catch him by the arm as he asked, "Well, old sport, how did you like the prayer-meeting last night?" Robert turned, and looking him straight in the eye, replied, "To me it was an eye-opener. These things you indulge in will, sooner or later, lead to

degradation and shame." This rebuff was given with such sincerity that Jimmy at once saw that Robert had grown up with a mind of his own. He was very much disappointed at the outcome of what he considered a good joke. Many times later, this stinging rebuke came to his mind, but it failed to make a deep enough impression to keep him from following the downward path. Getting out of bed, he hurriedly put on his clothes, Robert doing likewise, and they breakfasted together, after which Jimmy excused himself, saying that he had to go down to the store to straighten things up a bit. He intended to be away a couple of hours, and when he came back, they would go out to one of the parks for the evening. While he was gone, Robert wrote long letters to both Mamie and his mother, in which he gave a pleasing impression of Demoralburg, and his trip, but in no way mentioned any of his experiences, except the incident of the stranger at the wharf, and the kindness of Jimmy. By the time these were written and mailed, Jimmy had again returned, and at once they went out to the park, containing a sizeable zoo, where Robert thoroughly enjoyed himself during the long afternoon. Towards evening, Jimmy said he had an engagement, so after having dinner, they returned to the room where Robert remained to read, it now being too late to go to any of the churches that he would have preferred to visit.

The next morning, after a hurried breakfast, Jimmy scribbled down a few addresses of business firms as he was about to leave, suggesting that Robert call on them during the day with a view of securing a job. The first place at which he called was a large factory, where he was interviewed by the manager, who asked him a number of questions, mostly in regard to what experience he had. He answered conscientiously, but was soon rejected. The remainder of the firms suggested were then visited in turn, but in each case, the answer was the same. Robert felt keenly the insults that some of those in charge gave him, especially resenting the attitude of a large button manufacturer, whose insinuations as to his incompetence were grossly insulting, insomuch that, on leaving the place, Robert determined that if chance opportunity came to him, he would do everything to try to get even with the man. Never before had he known what it was to harbor a feeling of spite or revenge against anyone. Deeply humiliated from his first day's experience in trying for a position in the city, he wended his way back to the room, in the late afternoon to await Jimmy's

return. As the dinner hour passed, and still no sign of his friend, he got out his lunch-box again to prepare his evening meal. As he did so, it began to dawn on him that perhaps his mother's judgment had been much better than his. In the early morning, Jimmy returned with a splendid alibi, and many apologies. He had been detained to take a special inventory of stock, which to Robert sounded reasonable. He then inquired as to Robert's success, and on being told, gave a merry laugh as he said, "That's all in the day's work."

No doubt he knew something of the trials and experiences of the job-hunter who had no inside pull. He suggested reading the newspaper advertisements and visiting employment agencies. Once more, Robert, with renewed hope, made an early start, tackling the trials of another day. First he wrote down all the addresses from the newspaper advertisements which mentioned positions he thought he could fill, but they proved to be very few. Jimmy had warned him against what he called "blind ads." which, in most cases, were quack sales propositions. Applying to the firms he had noted took up the next two days but everywhere he was rebuffed and had nothing to show for his labour. He then went to an employment office, where he was received by a very affable and friendly man, who told him he could easily place him in a good job, but the fee for registration was two dollars, payable upon application. Robert hesitated, as he thought of parting with two dollars from his small roll, but he was influenced by the manager's promise that it would mean getting a good position. With this investment, and a great deal of hope, he completed another day. Once more back to the room, near the dinner hour, he again met the blonde-haired lady, Jimmy's friend. Seeing her through the glass-pane in the door, he was about to turn away, feeling that he might be intruding on Jimmy's privacy, when he heard her voice calling, "Mr. Benson, are you not coming in?" Opening the door, he was greeted in such a friendly manner, that he felt he had known her for years. Then seating herself beside him on the deep cushioned settee, she at once entered into conversation, showing such a broad knowledge of things in general, that he could not help but feel that she was a remarkable woman. Still he was at a loss to know why she took the liberty of coming to his friend's room at any time of the day. The conversation drifted to Jimmy and the way he and Robert had grown up together, and had lived together in a little town until hard times and unsettled conditions

had first sent Jimmy to other parts, and now himself. These details, she said, had the effect of bringing her own trials and adversities so prominently before her, that she felt she must unburden her mind for the solace of any sympathy she might receive. At first she hesitated as she commenced to tell her story, but somehow a feeling that Robert was more like a brother (she had never had one) prompted her to tell him her story, with such child-like sincerity, that it made her now appear an entirely different woman to what Robert had conceived her to be. Her story was almost unbelievable to him and as he compared her beauty and composed bearing with that of Mamie's, he could not conceive that any man, unless a contemptible scoundrel, would use her in such a despicable manner. The following was her story:

"Five years ago, she said, I met my husband, who was then working in a large button factory. After six months of thrilling courtship we were married. For our honeymoon, he received a three months' leave of absence, which we spent on a tour of the South Sea Islands. The memory of each day still clings as if it had been woven into my mind with threads of gold. We returned, and the next three years was almost a continuation of the honeymoon. During that time my husband was made manager with an increase in salary. From then on, he commenced staying out nights, and I began to ask why. Business, always business, was the excuse, until I began to detest the very word. At last I became suspicious that all was not above board, and had his office watched, and thus learned that most of his leisure was spent in the "Palm Gardens," one of the lowest and most disgraceful dives in the city; a place in which no respectable man or woman would want to be seen. In utter disgust, I first appealed to his better nature, his business judgment, and asked him to think of our homelife, but all to no avail. Time passed, and oh, the lonely hours and nights, during which, in my desperation, I bathed my own body with my tears. Money? Yes, I had plenty, enough to indulge my every whim, and this, my husband thought, was sufficient for my happiness. Money can never buy the jewel of love though. About a year ago, Jimmy, your friend, came to my home, canvassing for one of the large grocery stores. Whether it was my loneliness, or his winning manner, I don't know, but at once, I felt a longing for his friendship, which he has very generously given, till now it seems I can hardly allow a day to pass without seeing him, usually taking in a show or going to his club. The

occasions when we spend an hour or two together are like an oasis. I know it may not look right before the eyes of the world, and many will point a finger of scorn at me, but I feel I am a prisoner of circumstances. As our religion does not allow my husband and me to become separated legally, I am helpless. Often I do not see my husband but once or twice during the week, so that homelife to me has no more meaning."

As she finished her story, and wiped away her tears, Robert unconsciously grasped her hand, saying, "Mrs. Cooke, you have my heartfelt sympathy, and I only wish I could be of some service to you." Knowing little of the tragedies of homelife, he was unable to offer any advice, but he asked whether if drink had caused this great change in her husband. She said she believed it had been the original cause of it. Just then Jimmy entered, and apologizing for being late, hurried into another suit, and excusing himself to Robert, stated that they were going to a club dance, and would not be back till late.

CHAPTER 9

"There is a limit, however, at which forbearance ceases to be a virtue."—Anonymous.

THE NEXT morning Robert was at the private employment office long before opening hour, with high hopes that the promises he had received would soon lead to success. After keeping him waiting for two hours, under the pretence of looking through his letters and files for something that would best suit him, the agent at last advised Robert that the only thing he had to suggest this morning was to follow up the request from a gardener, about five miles from the city, who wanted someone to trim his raspberry canes. At first, Robert was disposed to pass it up as he knew little about such work, but when he thought of his dwindling funds and the fact that he was still imposing on Jimmy's generosity, he decided to try the work, trusting to his general handiness to help him out. It was well on toward noon before he came to a small cottage close to the road, with what looked to be a big garden round it. His knock at the door was answered by a long, lanky man with chin whiskers, who, before he could speak, had to get rid of a big chew of tobacco.

"Wa'al, I'se a-reckon you're the boy sent to cut the canes," he concluded. He then led the way to a large patch of dead-looking raspberry bushes, explaining how he wanted the work done, which made it so much easier for Robert, as he did not like to admit his ignorance. Taking hold of the work in his usual energy and speed, Robert made splendid progress so that by the time one o'clock had come and gone, and no dinner call was given, he commenced to look longingly towards the house, as the inner man persistently made its demands known. At last, noting the old man coming from the house, he felt obliged to ask if it was near dinner time. The old man answered that they did not board their help. With a feeling of keen disappointment, for which he did not altogether blame the old gardener, he continued with his work. He took several drinks of water, finishing the task just as it was becoming too dark to see the bushes clearly. He then went to the house to ask what time he would be expected in the

morning, only to be told that he had done so well that the few left on the other side would be finished by the gardener himself. He was offered two dollars as payment for the work. Robert looked at it, then at the old man, and said, "There must be some mistake; I was told by the agent that five dollars would be paid for the job." The old man, however, maintained that he had offered only three dollars a day, and besides he had worked only two-thirds of the day. Feeling that he was either the victim of the old man's selfishness, or of a misunderstanding with the agent, he took the amount offered, and returned to the city, tired, discouraged, and ravenously hungry from his first day's work.

After paying his return fare, he had a balance of only one dollar and seventy-five cents. This made him think that, although things had been bad back home, he had never been obliged to work all day without any dinner, only to be cheated out of part of the expected pay. He resolved that if this was the class of work Demoralburg had to offer him, he would soon return home. On reaching Jimmy's home, he found him there and in a happy mood. As he related his experience of the day's work, Jimmy assumed an attitude of grave concern, and said that he would return to the agent in the morning, and check on the particulars re the gardener. If he had played Robert for a fool, he would knock his block off, but as to going home, he must simply forget it, and remember that it was always the darkest before dawn.

They then went out to a cafe, where, after enjoying a real supper, for which Jimmy paid, Robert felt the world once more was a good place in which to live. Jimmy then suggested that they spend the evening at the theatre. This appealed to Robert, for he had never had the privilege of seeing any of the good dramas of which he had read. Again he received another surprise, when the curtain was raised, and a number of very beautiful girls came dancing out in such abbreviated costumes, that Robert was sure it must have been raised before they were ready to take their cue. After they had sung a slangy chorus and cracked some crude jokes, he soon sized up the kind of theatre it was, for it was one of the most daring burlesque shows. Having learned the discretion of silence, he thanked Jimmy for the pleasant evening, but his manner belied his words. As they prepared for bed, Robert, as usual, dropped to his knees, and in simple faith, made his appeal to Him, whom he so implicitly trusted, to protect him from the temptations found on every side. Sometimes in the peace of mind that reflected

itself in his countenance apparently made a deep impression on Jimmy, and for several hours that night he debated in his mind whether the life he was living was worth the cost, in contrast to that led by Robert. He thought of the teachings of his youth and his home and also of what his new city friends would classify as old-fashioned religion. "I can't give it up now", he thought resignedly, as he finally drifted off.

Next day found Robert up prepared for whatever duties it had to offer. It was long before the average city-dwellers rising time, and probably many had yet to see their beds, but, with a feeling that something must be accomplished, he felt more content in being up and around. It was two hours before the agent could be seen. He had decided that unless he had something worthwhile to offer, he would follow Jimmy's advice, and ask for particulars on his work the day before. As he approached the office he greeted Robert most affably. He followed him up the stairs to make his request for work, but the agent started to offer excuses at once. Finally, Robert, fed up with his talk, caught him by the arm, and said, "Now I want the truth about the position you sent me out to yesterday, as I received only two dollars, and was told that was all the work there was." The man started off on another long story about destroying the records after the job was filled, but Robert, now gripping him more tightly, his fingers sinking into his flesh, as if they were bands of iron, demanded his listing fee as having been taken from him on false pretenses. A look of guilt showed in the man's eyes. Robert's determined behaviour having, no doubt, the desired effect, as, after bluffing that if he did not let go, he would call the police, at which Robert grabbed him by the coat collar as if about to give him a good shake, he agreed to return the money.

With the money once more in his pocket, and feeling that his experience could be placed with the other valuable lessons he had already learned in the city, Robert once more was on the street. He felt that among its thousands, there was none he could speak to in a friendly way, and becoming discouraged, he began thinking that it was strange that Jimmy, having written him such glowing accounts of the place, could not get him a job of any kind, let alone the kind of job he really wanted. The thought of returning home again came to him, but he at once became determined to stick it, as he thought of Jimmy's words, "The darkest hour is just before dawn." He now realized that what Jimmy

had done, he could do. He decided to try the stores and find a job of some kind, or starve in the attempt. At once, he purchased a couple of papers to look the ads. over, marking those which he felt he could fill. He then proceeded to make the rounds until the entire list had been covered, as well as several stores, at all of which he was told that the positions advertised had been filled. As the day again drew to a close, he retraced his steps to Jimmy's room, greatly depressed in spirit, and like many another boy out to conquer the world, he was to learn what an uphill proposition had to be faced.

When Jimmy failed to make his appearance at the dinner hour, Robert again visited his lunch-box, which now contained only a few dried biscuits that had been set on one side till the pie and cake had first been eaten. He now realized more keenly than ever, that it was necessary for him to save every cent. In the solitude of the room, during that evening, many pictures of city life showing extravagance and waste passed before his mind, only to perplex him still more, as he thought what a challenge it was to the idea he had been taught of God's gracious promise, as given in Matt. 6:33, "But seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you." Could this statement be false, or was it because he could not understand its meaning? Here, those who were living a life of sin, indifferent to His Holy truths, had most material blessings. Once more, his mother's words came to him though, "Judge not that you be not judged."

Determined to keep his faith and not lose hope, Robert then retired to bed in hopes that sleep would bring peace of mind. However, hearing a distant clock as it struck every hour he was further reminded of the power of mind over the body, till with the dawning of the early morning hours, Jimmy made his appearance. Being in a jovial state of mind, he at once started a pleasant conversation, that was soon to make Robert forget his troubles. After hearing of his failure to get a job, Jimmy comforted Robert by saying, "You must not let a little thing like that make you blue. Have a good sleep this forenoon, for, as it is Saturday there is very little use in making any calls. To-morrow we will take a trip into the country." This plan was pleasant food for thought, and soon had the desired effect, for a few minutes later he was fast asleep, not waking till after ten o'clock. Hurriedly dressing, he had breakfast, after which he again scanned the advertising

section of Jimmy's paper. While he was thus busily engaged, the door opened, and Mrs. Cooke entered, looking more charming than ever, in a new fall suit.

On learning of his failure to land a job she pondered a moment and then suggested she would take him straight downtown and introduce him to some of the managers of the larger stores where she was known. At once filled with new enthusiasm, and grateful for such an offer, he made preparations to go, by donning his best clothes. A few minutes later, with his boyish face, manly figure, and a somewhat military swing, he was marching along beside her.

The first call was made at a large department store, where three of the managers were met and introduced to Robert. Their friendly manner and courtesy at once showed that Mrs. Cooke was a good friend and valued customer, but when the matter of employment was mentioned, they most respectfully expressed their regret. They had nothing to offer at the present, but might have in a week or ten days. The second call secured no results either with the exception of the fact that one of the managers had Robert fill out an application for employment that gave the appearance of greater consideration.

The next call was about two blocks further on down a side street on which was an imposing-looking building, with large gold letters that spelled "Cafe La Francais." They soon came to a door marked, "Above, Ladies' Entrance." This led down a long hall, apparently on the side of the building, in which were several clusters of soft, subdued lights. This led to a long stairway that turned off to one side covered with a heavy pile carpet. This, in turn, led to a spacious room with a polished floor, used for dancing. Round the four walls were small booths, heavily draped with the most beautiful rose-coloured tapestries only to blend with diffused lights of the same colour. The scene, as a whole, gave Robert an idea of luxury such as he had never seen before. Going forward to one of the booths near a front window, Mrs. Cooke sat down suggesting they have lunch before going any further. Robert declined with profuse thanks as he said he had breakfasted shortly before. The thought most firmly fixed in his mind, however, was that he could not afford to pay for a meal in a place of this kind, but with a waiter standing in readiness, the order was given quickly by Mrs. Cooke. Her idea was to get his viewpoint on the class of work he would prefer. Robert told her

that his intention when leaving home had been to try some branch of engineering, but that since coming to the city, the idea of his old work had again made its appeal and he would like to try out store work. For the present he was willing to take anything though. Mrs. Cooke thought that he could readily adapt himself to any kind of inside work. As she was thinking of those among her acquaintances she could best approach, a man with a dignified air, well-dressed and with a French twist to his moustache, was about to pass their booth, as though on a trip of inspection. When he saw Mrs. Cooke, he stepped through the partly-opened curtain, and taking her hand in a most affected manner, said, "I am charmed to meet you, Mrs. Cooke." She then introduced Robert to him as her friend, calling him by name, Louis Villenue, the proprietor of the cafe. She then asked if he had chanced to know of anyone requiring help, as her friend intended to remain in the city if he could find a suitable position. Giving his moustache another stroke, as if to make sure it was in exact position, he said that if he had any experience in the cafe business he could use him right there as he had let two waiters go the night previous for inattention to work." At this Robert perked up quickly, as he thought it would be such a pleasant place to work. It was work anyway. It never crossed his mind that drinking was the most important part of the business. He then told of the little experience he had, which did not seem to make any impression on the proprietor. He was hired, however, more as a courtesy to Mrs. Cooke, a valued patron. Robert was asked if he could start immediately as the cafe was short-handed plus the fact that it was Saturday. Robert eagerly agreed, the proprietor giving him a card of introduction to the head waiter. Lunch then continued, during which the friendly conversation further cemented their ties of friendship. Indeed, Mrs. Cooke promised she would call sometime when it was convenient for him to get off and they would take in a show together. Robert replied that it would give him great pleasure.

Knowing that the headwaiter would probably be expecting him, she took her adieu; Robert going direct to the head waiter, was assigned to act as assistant waiter and pantry hand. To him it was honest work and that was all that counted. He was given a white apron and coat, and given some instruction in his duties and sent to the kitchen, filled with the exultancy of his first new job in the city. When an order came from the kitchen for one

large lobster, he went to the ice-box in the basement for it. As he raised the lid and saw the box literally crawling with the slimy green things, reminding him of pictures he had seen of fierce Chinese dragons, he wondered how he was going to get one without a shovel. Getting a stick, he put it in to separate them, when another caught it in his claws with such force, that he nipped it off. He was just congratulating himself that it was not his finger, when a stentorian voice from upstairs broke his reverie, "Hey, there, what's all the delay? You don't have to go to Massachusetts for one, do you?" However, on explaining his difficulty, another waiter appeared, and reaching in, caught one around the back, behind the front legs, and offered it to Robert, who stood hesitating about it. The other, growing impatient, said, "Here, you hick, are you going to take it or not?" at which Robert slowly reached for it, noting at the same time how he held it. The frightened expression he bore apparently touched the heart of the waiter, who then showed him how to take hold of it so as not to get caught in its nippers. Upon taking it to the cook, he received a further surprise, when she took it from him and tossed it into a pot of boiling water on the big range.

Thinking that she hadn't noticed it was still alive, Robert said, "That lobster is not dead!" She replied, "The devil soon will be" and went on with her preparations. Seeing Robert still curious as to its fate, standing by, the cook started to question him as to where he came from and how he happened to be there. She was a woman of forty, of Irish descent and big-hearted with a mother's sympathetic love for those she accepted as friends, but a devil, with a sting of a viper for those who crossed her or were disloyal. She had almost professional insight into human nature, gained through experience with all classes and conditions of people. Being proficient in her profession, her position was secure, her special dishes having made the Cafe La Francaise, the most famous in the city. She had only one great weakness, a liking for drink and unless she had partaken of several stiff glasses of gin, her epicurean ability seemed to lie dormant. This, no doubt, was due to the years she had been addicted to its use. As he replied to her questions, with his usual frankness and sincerity, she was, no doubt, attracted to him as a contrasting personality to those hardened by years of hard living with whom she usually came in contact. It aroused something within her better nature, prompting her to give him advice as to various pitfalls to be avoided in a

big city. When she finished talking, she took the lobster from the pot as it was now transformed to a beautiful red. As Robert expressed his astonishment at the change in its appearance, she replied, "Divil of a change is that to what it will soon be in a sea of champagne, in some luxury-crazed pervert's belly, whose thoughts will be turned to that of a harlot." After thus expressing her mind, she turned and spat in the damper of the range, as if by such an act, she was clearing her mind of a foul thought. Robert, somewhat mystified by her words, tried in vain to puzzle out the inference, but before another two months passed, he was to be made conversant with its horrible truth.

The first afternoon and evening passed in learning some of the details of his work, his hours being from ten in the morning to ten in the evening. With his first day's work finished, he hurried to the room to tell Jimmy of his success, but as was often to prove the case, he had not yet returned. A few minutes later, tired from the excitement of the day, he was asleep.

Next morning, he woke early, telling Jimmy of his new job, and how he had received it through the kindness of Mrs. Cooke, of whom he spoke most highly. Jimmy told him all about his meeting and friendship with her, of which Robert had already been informed. He then told him how her husband had so ill-treated her, and what a miserable bounder he knew him to be. At the mention of his business, Robert at once placed him as the man who had treated him so shamefully when he was looking for employment. Robert then mentioned that he thought it would be better now for him to get a room closer to his work, but Jimmy said there was no hurry, as there was plenty of room there, until he felt permanently settled.

CHAPTER 10

"Patience is the ballast of the soul, that will keep it from rolling and tumbling, in the greatest storms."—Bishop Hopkins.

IN THE days that followed, Robert was to get an insight into a type of life that even his wildest dreams had never pictured, for in this noted cafe, with its established reputation for its menu's, wines and special entertainment, all classes and conditions of people were to be met, from a beggar seeking a handout at the back door, to the millionaire sportsmen and women, who spent their time and money as if it was only snow, to be melted before a hot sun, so that they could more effectively indulge their selfish and lustful desires. The large dining-room on the first floor, catered to business people, who always seemed to be in a hurry, in their mad chase after the elusive dollar. It was here, that during the first week, Robert was used for the more menial tasks, but finding favor with the head-waiter through his strict attention to work, he was promoted several times before the end of the month.

At the end of the second month, he was serving at the coffee counter. He had only been at this two weeks, when he was asked by the proprietor if he would like to go upstairs to serve at an increased salary and wear a uniform. This at once appealed to him, not only for the increased salary, but because it would take him away from the cursed bar, from which he had had to carry many drinks to the tables. Believing that in the room above, where ladies were catered to, he would not come so much in contact with it, he accepted the offer.

The upstairs, as he remembered it, from his visit there with Mrs. Cooke, would be so much different. This imaginary difference, however, was due to his having seen it at the quiet hour of noon and not at midnight, when its tables were always filled, as it was the rendezvous of the socially elite, or those who had the price to pay for the entertainment and special privileges it afforded. Many of the scenes he witnessed inside the curtains of the various booths, as he served men and women with the costliest wines and food, were such as to produce in his mind clearly pictures of the

scenes of dissipation about which he had read in history, such as the debauchery of ancient Rome at the zenith of its glory. Often, standing by the dumbwaiter, inhaling the fumes of the most expensive wines, from all parts of the world, as they were sent up from the wine cellars below, his thoughts would wander to ideals formed from his early teaching. What explanation could be offered to show why God had made this world and sent his only son, Jesus Christ, as atonement, to save it, when the great majority of mankind never seemed to consider it, but went on sinking deeper into sin? Was this great sacrifice to prove of no avail, for here the Devil certainly seemed to predominate!

Here the people, who steeped themselves in sin, seemed to have so much money to spend, while those, he knew, who tried to follow the straight and narrow path, had to suffer so much penury and want. But again his mother's words were responsible for bringing to him a different viewpoint, "These are but refining trials in a Christian's life."

His second Sunday in the city again stood out in his memory, as he remembered how he had had to proceed to work as the church bells tolled their beautiful notes of welcome on all sides, re-echoing in the distance. He had expected to attend one of the churches and to take part in the great work of bringing the news of salvation to the world. Well, now after nearly three months, he had never been to one, being obliged to work on the Sabbath day, dispensing the cursed wines that brought degradation and ruin to so many homes. How could fate be so cruel? Once more at his post of duty, listening to the slang phrases of customers and working associates, he was soon brought from his dream world to the daily grind of life in all its reality.

The weekly letters from home and Mamie were always inspiring. Mamie's letters were full of her studies and college life, and fond expectations of again meeting at home for Christmas; his mother's full of kindly interest, always stressed the bright side of conditions at home. To reply was always more or less of an ordeal to him, not because he did not wish to answer, but that he had to cloak the truth in order to avoid stating what he was actually doing, for he knew it would bring endless worry to his mother. He had merely stated that he was working in one of the larger cafes, without saying that the most important part of its business lay in licentious drinking.

In this way the time passed till December arrived, when the

usual realistic advertisements of the railway companies, depicting the spirit of goodwill, home and friends, plus the general Christ-massy extant, made him feel he must go home, come what may. Another letter from Mamie saying she would be leaving for home soon and expected to see him without fail, gave him the courage to approach the proprietor at once, to see if he could get away.

That evening he made his request and was told that owing to the attention he had given his work, he could have ten days off, but must arrange to be back for New Year's Eve, one of the cafe's gala nights. His savings looked quite sufficient to cover his trip and purchase his remembrances. The thought of spending Christmas at home, with his loved ones, made his work much pleasanter than it had been before and the days sped by. Three days before he expected to make his trip, however, one of the waiters was dismissed for drunkenness, and Robert was asked to take his place, being told that it meant not only a further increase in salary. It would place him in a position to receive numerous tips, which he abhorred, but was willing to take, believing that the sooner he got sufficient money together he could take a chance on getting a better job, quitting the present one. Circumstances at home came into the matter, too, for the next day a letter from home told him that his father had to undergo a minor operation, which had taken most of the money he had earned. They would have to deny themselves several things for Christmas this year, but they hoped he would be home. That night, returning to his room, he read and re-read the letter, for it brought up a question which was so hard to settle. Should he go home and enjoy the pleasure of Christmas with them and Mamie, or stay and send home the money, which he now felt was badly needed. The two ideas vied with other so strongly in his mind that it was impossible to arrive at a decision. At last, believing that there was only one way to settle it, he asked God to direct him. With all the sincerity his soul was capable of expressing he asked for Divine guidance. The next day, however, he received an answer in the most unexpected manner. Shortly after he had taken up his duties, he was approached by the dignified proprietor, who said, "Robert, you asked me a short time ago to get away for some holidays. These I promised, but that was before you were given your new work. I can't possibly carry out my promise now due to increased business, as there are few capable hands at this important end of our service. I will, however, be pleased to extend

the time to two weeks, at a more convenient time later on." Robert was considerably upset but swallowing his disappointment he said, "I would have liked to go home very much but if not convenient I will remain." That night, in the quiet of his room, he again pondered the question. Could it be possible that this was God's answer to his prayer? If so, how could he reconcile it with his faith?

Before he slept, a well-worded letter was written to both his mother and Mamie, in which no idea of his disappointment was conveyed, but which stated that due to promotion, it would be now impossible for him to get home for Christmas. In his mother's letter he enclosed a substantial cheque, which he asked her to use for the family's requirements. To Mamie, he sent a beautiful red-letter edition of the Bible, for which she had once mentioned a keen desire.

A few days later he received a reply from her, acknowledging his thoughtful gift, but very forcibly expressing her feelings, almost to the point of jealousy; business must be more important than seeing her, she suggested. This was followed by several pages conveying her kindly consideration, however, and expressing regret that he could not possibly get home, as it would spoil the spirit of Christmas. The letter closed with her sincerest regards for a Merry Christmas, and advice that a token of her wishes was being sent under separate cover. In due time, this arrived, and on opening the box Robert found a band ring with the beautifully embossed insignia of a beaver on a log on the outside, beneath which was engraved, "Ever Yours, Mamie." As he examined it, it carried his mind back to the Beaver Dam, their trysting place. She, too, must have had it in mind when she chose the design, he thought. He having oft remarked to her, about their intelligence, energy and judgment. Therefore, the memento was doubly significant. His mother's letter was then read, thanking him for his generous cheque and unselfishness in making such a sacrifice, and assuring him that though he was not there in person she knew he would be with them in spirit.

Considerably encouraged by his letters, Robert went back to his work, where his obliging manner was constantly winning the popular approval of those he was called upon to serve, but upon whom he looked with disgust, because of their wasteful and extravagant habits, and especially their disreputable morals.

A peep behind the heavily brocaded curtains of the booths so often revealed some prominent business man embracing a

bloated-faced gamin, or a wife, who possibly a short time ago had been a dutiful mother, but who now, in her thoughtless way, had become imbued with the society bug, and was spending her time with some lounge-lizard. This class of man, he decided, was good for nothing else than displaying good clothes, bought with ill-gotten gains, and dancing the latest steps, making them idols in the eyes of such women, while the husbands were looked upon as old-fashioned. The so-called shieks with their flashy clothes and polished manners, flaunted before the eyes of unsophisticated girls, were willing bait to lead them to ruin and white slavery. There were the factory-made beauties, too, who, with drink and drugs, were making their last bid for pleasure, by dressing like French dolls for any man with the price to play with as he liked. This was the panorama of life that night after night unfolded itself before him, sometimes better, and sometimes worse. Many times, Robert felt like chucking it all and getting back to the country and its clean air, where God was revealed in the glories of Nature, but on such occasions, the thoughts of big tips given him for looking wise and keeping his mouth shut, made the scenes easier to bear.

His new hours were from nine o'clock in the evening to five o'clock in the morning. Time brought little change, except on Christmas Eve, when it appeared that everyone was drunk but the help, and they were only kept sober through fear of the proprietor. The monotony was broken by a lady customer, who had recently commenced to make nightly visits at a late hour. She was a perfect blonde of striking appearance, dressed in the most elaborate clothes which her figure showed off to great advantage. Usually seating herself at one of the tables under Robert's supervision, even waiting till one would be empty, she had been dubbed by the other waiters as Robert's blonde friend. It was soon learned that she was a star actor in one of the leading beauty revues at a vaudeville theatre. For a time Robert thought nothing of the lady's custom, except that he was made the victim of the others' jests.

Finding her very friendly and an entertaining talker, quite often in serving her, he would pass a few words with her about local events. Her friendly interest, however, seemed to be growing, for but a short time later she handed him a complimentary ticket for a matinee next afternoon at the theatre where she was playing. For this he thanked her, believing that the ticket was but a small

mark of her appreciation of his services. At the matinee the next afternoon he was impressed by her acting and dancing and could not help feeling attracted by her beauty. He knew, however, he could not think of her seriously. When the show was about over an usher handed him a note from her in which she asked him to remain a few minutes after the show. This he did with a certain feeling of elation at being marked out for special attention by the leading actress. Upon meeting him at the outer vestibule, she stated that, as she was going to see some friends near Playmor Park, she would like to have his company, if he was at liberty (she knew he was free from the cafe for the rest of the day). Robert, feeling that it was but a friendly gesture, accepted her kindly offer, but before they had again returned, he sensed that she was desperately in love with him, and that he would have to be on his guard.

Following this episode he was made the recipient of several other invitations which he refused, inventing different excuses, until finally, after a midnight meal at the cafe, she insisted on Robert accompanying her to a winter resort for the week-end, speaking in glowing terms of the pleasure they would derive from the visit together. Again he firmly declined, stating it was impossible to get away. His refusal induced her to go to the proprietor at once, asking that Robert be given time off. As she had contributed much money to his coffers, Villennue answered her in his most pleasant manner, pointing out that although Saturday was one of their busy days, he must never-the-less give Robert a few days holiday as he had promised them to him some time ago. He could go, he said. With this good news, she returned to the booth just as Robert had brought in her dessert. At once, she told him the good news with an air of real triumph. Robert was not only shocked at the idea of her asking his employer, but he was at a loss to know how he could get out of this suggested trip. For a few minutes he stood hesitating. Then he said, "Miss Vamptton, I appreciate your kind offer, but considering our different stations in life such a trip would be most embarrassing for both of us, therefore, I cannot . . .". Before he could go further, she interrupted him saying, "You simply cannot say no, for stations or no stations I love you with a consuming passion and have done ever since I first met you." Completely disconcerted by her abrupt and impetuous manner, and at a loss for words, Robert's first impulse was to rush away, but thinking of the scene it would

create, he decided to tell her that it was impossible for him to go as he was already engaged. The constant ringing of his bell gave him an excuse to hurry to another booth, but before doing so, he promised to give her a reply next evening. She accepted with a winning smile, showing the confidence she felt.

When he returned to his room he lay down for his regular sleep (having come off night duty) but as the perplexing situation had to be solved he gave up trying to sleep. His first thought was, "How innocently one can be led into great difficulties." This case was an illustration for he had never, in the slightest way, given this beautiful girl any encouragement, his feelings toward her being only friendly. Therefore, he was under no obligation to her and he resolved to tell her frankly, that beyond friendship, nothing further could be asked of or given by him. He would tell the truth, mentioning Mamie, which he felt sure she would understand, with her full experience of life.

It was shortly after midnight the next day before she made her appearance, looking if possible, more attractive than ever, but for Robert her presence meant a trying ordeal that had to be met. After taking her usual order, which she gave in a jocular way, she displayed the happy mood she was in. After he had served the first three courses, Robert seated himself opposite her, and pulling the curtain, again found it difficult to express what he wanted to say. Mistaking his hesitancy she said, "Robert, I know that you have decided to make the trip with me." Robert quickly determined to disabuse her mind as he said, "No, Miss Vampton, I regret very much but it is impossible for me to accept your courtesies or your love, the reason being that I am already engaged." A look of injured pride at once showed in her eyes, quickly followed with a stare of revenge. Now her mood changed to that of indifference, as she shrugged her shoulders, "Well, such is life. Let us have a little drink and be friends." Pleased that she had taken it so good-naturedly, he hurried back with the bottles, which he placed on the table before her. Then, pretending to let her purse slip from her hand, she dropped a silver dollar on the floor. It rolled out on the dance floor. As Robert went to get it, she emptied a small powder into the glass which she then set before his place. As he returned immediately, she barely had time to place the paper that held the powder back in her purse, when he handed the money to her. Telling him to keep it for the drinks, she

lightly proposed a toast, both lifting their glasses and drinking to it.

Robert went to make payment for the drinks but even by the time he returned the powerful drug had already commenced to work on him. His face became flushed, and a feeling of nausea came over him, as he remarked, that although he very seldom took a drink, he had never felt one re-act like that before. His bell calling him to another table, he went and took the order, but before he had completed it, he felt so dizzy that he was obliged to ask one of the other waiters to finish it, as he found it necessary to go home. The blonde, who had watched the proceedings, knew exactly what to expect. As he came out with his coat and hat on she followed him out to the street, where, as she caught up with him, he told her how ill he felt. At once she suggested getting a cab to take him home. Although he afterwards remembered saying that he could get there alright, he did not remember getting into the cab, which she called or that it took them to her apartment some distance away.

Here she intended him to remain till his will had been broken by the drug's powerful influence, for when its effects commenced to wear off, she had seen to it that he was given more. Sunday, being the third day he was under its power, luck, however played into Robert's hand, for being an addict herself to its demoralizing effects, and having sent word to the theatre that she was sick, and could not return till Monday, his blonde gaoler had taken an extra dose that was to keep her under its spell much longer than she expected, so that Robert came out of the lethargy long enough to realize that something extraordinary had happened. As he looked about and saw the well-furnished place, his first thought was that, due to the pain in his head, he had been knocked down on the street and carried into this home. Looking into the mirror of a nearby dresser he could see no bruises, but his face looked so haggard that he knew something was wrong. He was wondering if it were possible that he had broken his vow, and if the cursed drink were responsible for it all, when his attention was directed to a couch nearby, on which reposed his blonde friend, her partly disrobed body covered by a silk comforter. Her sallow face, from which the beauty had disappeared with the cosmetics, was sufficient evidence of dissipation, and Robert at first thought that, in some unaccountable way, that they had made the trip together to the winter resort she had mentioned. As he noticed the beautiful

furnishings of the room, he began to wonder how they both came to be sleeping in the same room, sleeping on settee beds. He felt that there was something very wrong about the whole situation, although his mind seemed to be functioning only in a dazed way. He was able to realize, however, that he should not be there, and must get away. Seeing his clothes on the back of a nearby chair, he dressed as hurriedly as he could, and stole quietly from the room to the street, where he proceeded to the nearest street-car line. After boarding a street-car and making several transfers, he reached his rooms.

Then taking a bath and dressing for duty in two hours' time, he sat down to ponder on what story he should offer on his return to duty. To tell the truth that he hadn't known what had affected him or where he'd been taken would be foolish, he thought, for he would not be believed. If he gave the impression that he had been drinking a black mark against his character would be registered. He finally decided that as far as the waiters were concerned, he would try to laugh it off. To the proprietor, however, he was afraid he would have to tell a lie, and admit that he went out for a week-end excursion, as he would already be assuming such to have been the case. With this idea of defence fully decided upon he left for his work.

He was, however, saved from making any false statement, due to the fact that the proprietor was out of the city. That evening, on placing his first order in the kitchen, his old friend, the cook, at once asked him with a motherly interest, where he had been. Robert told her he would be back later and as soon as he got the chance he returned to the kitchen, deciding that he would tell the cook the truth, knowing she would not hold him up to ridicule. He, therefore, told of the whole experience with the woman, whom he knew best as the blonde, with the exception of the proposal of love she had made him which he felt was too personal. Showing a deep interest in what he had told her, she came up, as if to look him over more closely, and after doing so, stood in thought for a moment, then said, scornfully, "I believe you have fallen into the hands of that hellcat courtesan, Mademoiselle LeFleur, headliner for the Royster Burlesquers, who I have heard, is a woman without any conscious scruples to achieve her selfish ends." Then she asked him to remove his coat, and rolling up his shirt sleeve, quickly remarked, "Oh, the she devil, I thought as much," as she noted the tell-tale marks of the poisonous needle in his arm.

Then looking him in the eye, told him what she believed had taken place. First, he had been drugged by something she had put in the drink he had taken, and kept that way under the treacherous needle. Due to good luck on his part he had come to his senses before she had. Otherwise, beyond a question of doubt, she had intended to keep him under its influence till his will was broken, the cook believed. When she was through work she would go to a doctor she knew and get for him an antidote to get the poison out of his system. Robert, at first, could hardly believe that this could have happened to him, but now through what he had been told of the action of drugs, it appeared to be only too true.

His next worry was as to what he would tell Jimmy, as he didn't wish to lie to him. Afraid to tell him the truth, in case he would mention it in some way in his letters, and the news should get to Mamie or his mother and father, to whom it would be impossible to make any explanation, he resolved he couldn't take that chance. Still he knew that Jimmy would be curious as to his absence of three nights, which, at first, he had believed was only one. He thought of saying that they'd been short-handed at the cafe and that he'd had to work overtime, necessitating his sleeping there. This idea seemed most plausible. However, due to the fact that Jimmy had not spent many of the nights at home, himself, the episode was never mentioned. This was one thing for which Robert felt most grateful to fate, but it was some weeks before he could make himself believe that God had allowed him to pass through such temptation. Finally he did conclude that God had ordained it to show him the sinfulness of sin.

CHAPTER 11

"Cheerful looks, kind words, and a speedy pardon are the best revenge we can inflict on the ungenerous and unjust."—St. Augustine.

THE remainder of the winter months passed away with the usual routine, and occasional drunken orgy at the cafe, but the blonde never showed up, although there were times when Robert wished for the opportunity to tell her what he thought of such human parasites. Perhaps it was all for the best that they had not since met, he thought.

With the longer days of spring bringing to him thoughts of the countryside and longing for a change of occupation, Robert once more decided to get away from the cafe. Again he made a diligent search for a position that would be more to his liking, but after spending his afternoons for nearly three weeks in vain searching for a job, he learned that having no experience in other lines of work, only jobs of a similar nature to his present one were available. Jimmy had little in the way of concrete proposals to make regarding a different job, so Robert finally decided to seek out Mrs. Cooke and ask her advice.

A few days after deciding to see her, however, he was called into the office of the proprietor, who, after making a few commonplace remarks, said, "In appreciation of the service you have given, we have decided to offer you a position which will pay double the salary you are now getting, besides tips, which are substantial. The only thing we ask is attentive service and—to hear nothing and see nothing." At this, the proprietor touching his ears, said, "You understand?" To Robert, this appeared almost too good to be true, believing he knew all the work that had to be done. He still was not quite clear on what was meant by "to see nothing and hear nothing," as he had never gossiped about any of the patrons. At once the tempting offer was accepted, and he was told he would take over his new position that evening. His period of duty would be two hours shorter also.

That evening he was inducted into his new duties by the proprietor, becoming waiter in charge of the Salon, a place the exist-

ence of which he had never guessed. It was an annex opening off the ladies' entrance hall, the passage to which was concealed by a beautiful Chinese screen. The actual door which looked like a panel could only be opened from the inside by pressing an electric button, in the office of the proprietor himself. It looked like fairyland with its exquisite furnishings, beautiful tapestries and heavy pile carpet. At the far end was a small room, containing the choicest wines and liquors, and a dumbwaiter, opening into the pantry, also opened by an electric button. Here Robert learned how orders were to be taken and recorded. He was then shown the three rooms which were actually elaborate suites, each containing sitting rooms with baths and toilets to match. The first was decorated throughout in gold, the next in a Chinese shade of blue, and the other, called the stateroom, was furnished with rare pieces of Chinese designs, that could be considered antique. The prices were fifteen dollars for the blue room, twenty dollars for the gold, and twenty-five dollars for the antique. Outside of the stock-room there was a little room at the end of the hall which had two small tables and an easy chair for his convenience in making out the accounts. When the proprietor had finished giving particulars of this ghetto of mysteries, Robert was left to make himself conversant with the minor details. Again looking the place over it was hard to make himself believe that this was part of the same world he was living in a year ago. Again he decided he would shake the dust of such a brothel from his feet, when, as it were, a picture of the "wolf of want" stared him in the face.

For the next three months he faithfully served in this position, during which time, he was to witness many scenes of moral depravity. However, it all proved to be a step forward to Robert's financial success, for the handsome tips he received helped swell his bank account. He bought new clothes, sent money home to his parents and left Jimmy's room for quarters nearer to the cafe. All this was like balm in soothing his stricken conscience when he felt he was losing his former high ideals.

One evening, after placing the rooms in order, he entered the hallway to notice a black cat pacing up and down in a somewhat disturbed manner. Although he was not superstitious he wondered at its presence there. He finally concluded that sometime when putting dishes through the door to the pantry, the cat must have jumped through and remained unnoticed. Taking Kitty by the neck, Robert passed into the pantry at the same time asking the

cook to see that it was put out. The moment her eyes came upon it, she shouted, "Oh, Mither of Saints, get the baste outa here. The devil will asure be a a'poppin' tonight." Robert could not help laughing at her as he closed the door.

He had almost forgotten the incident when some three hours later, in answer to a call from the bell in the goldroom, he was shocked to find the blonde, whom he had not seen since he was made the victim of her perfidy, sitting in there accompanied by the man who had treated him so shamefully when he called at his office to seek employment, and whom he now knew as Mrs. Cooke's unfaithful husband. A vicious look came to her eyes, as she recognized Robert, indicating, he thought, that she resented his escape from her clutches. Robert did not officially recognize her, and continued with his duties, arranging the table, and then taking the order given by Mr. Cooke. Passing the order on to the kitchen, he returned to place a beautiful screen in position thus shutting off the dining table from the elaborate couch on which they were seated. When the table was ready shortly after, he sounded the brass gong announcing dinner. Throwing from her shoulders an opera cloak, she came forward in a striking diaphanous gown that revealed more of her body than it covered. She was attentively escorted by her companion and both seated themselves at the well-appointed table. The full course dinner was then served, including many out-of season delicacies, and a bottle of Gold Seal Champagne. Robert was in the act of setting down a glass of it beside Miss Vampton, or the blonde, as he best knew her, when she deliberately jerked her arm back, knocking the glass from his hand, thus spilling the contents all over her dress. Her face turning purple with rage, and the hatred she had so far concealed, she showered a tirade of abuse on Robert, using the most vitriolic words in defamation of his character and blaming him for carelessness and neglect. She then requested her escort to report the matter at once to the proprietor, but wishing to show how well he could handle the situation, Cooke started to slander Robert, using the filthiest language. He had not gone far, however, when Robert, realizing that this was a case where he must act on his own initiative and remembering what abuse and actual harm he had received at their hands on separate occasions, really let go! "You miserable slimy devil," he said, "you and your contemptible hussy, if you think for a moment that because of your money you can come here to trick and insult a decent man you

have made a grave mistake." With this he struck the man with his closed fist with such force that he crashed backward, through an elaborate screen that stood before the bed, landing in a heap the other side of it. Quickly picking himself up Cooke rushed forward, picking up a chair with which to strike, but Robert quickly wrenched it from his hand, at the same time giving him another heavy upper cut that left him on the floor bleeding profusely while his fair partner screamed and sobbed with hysteria in an effort to attract attention.

Due to the soundproof walls, it was of no avail, of which fact Robert reminded her, as he grasped her by the arm in an iron grip. As she turned around to meet his eyes, now filled with the light of the conqueror, he said, "If you were a lady I would be loathe to grasp you in this way but as you are nothing more than a sneaking harlot, I would hardly think twice before throwing you and your despicable escort into the street where you belong. Now get into your clothes before I am forced to act in such a manner!" Seeing him so determined she was quick to act and turned to get her cloak. While this discussion was taking place, Cooke, believing it was an opportune moment to rush upon Robert, (who, however, had been watching his movements all the time in a mirror), had just reached striking distance when Robert reeled round and parried the blow with his left arm following it up quickly with a blow over the left eye that sent Cooke crashing back against the table with such force that both it and the dishes were broken and scattered in all directions. Realizing he was no match for this strong lithe and agile youth, Cooke asked for mercy but before it was given he was made to apologize for the insulting language he had used to Robert when seeking a position with the company of which he was the manager, and made to promise that he would treat his wife in a proper manner in future. Although at a loss to know how this youth knew about him or his wife, it was no time for quibbling and the apology and promise was quickly given.

Taking the precaution of securing Cooke's signature to a blank cheque marked, "not subject to countermand," to pay for the unassessed damage to the Gold Room, Robert then escorted Cooke and Miss Vampton to the doorway from the hall, leading to the street and freedom, during which time no word was spoken.

After they had left the proprietor was brought in to view the ruins of his beautiful gold-room, the first sight of which upset

him so much he was wringing his hands in sorrow. Knowing the character of the woman Robert had to deal with, he at once felt that the trouble had been between the guests themselves till Robert explained just what had been the trouble, as he handed him the open check. A look of agreeable surprise came over the proprietor's countenance, and he at once took his hand to congratulate him on his business ability, saying that he had not only acted wisely and properly under the circumstances, but had showed judgment that he highly appreciated. He admitted, however, that he had a great fear that this woman would endeavor to get even with him yet, and owing to her influence with the underworld would, no doubt, get him mixed up with the police, which was one thing he must take every precaution against, as to have a raid on the place would be the means of his losing many valued customers. He, therefore, felt that the only safe way out would be for Robert to leave. This he regretted very much owing to Robert's honesty and reliability, but the chance of a raid and a big fine was too great a risk to run. He offered Robert one hundred dollars to compensate him for such short notice of dismissal, which was at once accepted. Robert felt that here was the opportunity to get out of the distasteful business in which he had been compelled to make a living. Now he had sufficient money. More forcibly than ever he felt that life in a place like this was worse than wasted.

Robert stepped from the Cafe La Francais as one who had been freed from prison, but with almost four hundred dollars to his credit, giving him a feeling of greater confidence with which to face the world. He then went to see Jimmy and soon they were having a confidential talk in which Robert spoke of all that had taken place. Upon mentioning the fact that he was going to return home at once, however, Jimmy again tried to persuade him from doing so, pointing out that there was little opportunity for well-paid work at home. He maintained that sooner or later Robert would find the job he desired and be happy. Meditating for a few minutes, Robert said, finally, "Well, Jimmy, it's no use discussing it further. I have given my word to leave the city and have been paid to do so and leave I must." With these remarks he bade him good-bye and passed from the door, hurrying to his own room, where he packed his belongings, and made ready for the early train, which he felt would soon take him to the greatest place in the world—his home!

CHAPTER 12

"Character is made up of small duties faithfully performed, of self-denials, of self-sacrifice, of kindly acts of love and duty."

NEXT morning Robert was up bright and early arriving at the station two hours before the train was due to leave. Being unable to get his ticket that early he went to a bench and seated himself opposite another young man whose clothing showed that he belonged to the farmer class. Two large grips and a roll of blankets lay beside him. Robert thought that he was, no doubt, going to make the trip by boat afterwards possibly to some resort or to friends for the summer. In this case he might prove interesting company for the trip, as he had a friendly look on his face. It was not long before Robert engaged him in conversation, asking if he were taking the boat too.

"No," said the stranger, "I am taking the train which leaves in half-an-hour as my destination is the Canadian West which, at this time, is making an urgent call for harvest hands. My uncle, who lives at a place called Rosedale, in the Territories, has been writing home for sometime for either me or my brother to come out, mentioning the great opportunities it holds for young men. 'I'm from a small country town, about thirty miles out,' he further explained. Robert was at once deeply impressed, remembering how other boys back home, who had made the trip had brought back such glowing reports of its opportunities, and of the care-free life the people lived. Here was his great chance, he thought. It would only mean another two or three months away and he would return with some new experience. Before his optimism carried him farther, he was aware of the more cautious thoughts. It would not be right to go so far from home without letting his parents know. If he was taken ill who would care for him? While he was pondering the pros and cons, his new-found friend, sensing what he was thinking and realizing that he would like his company, said, "I trust you are also making the trip, as it will make it so much pleasanter to have company." Robert then replied, "No, I have never given it a thought till now. I am just returning

to my home in Ontario, after spending nearly a year in the city. Had I known of the need for harvesters sooner I would certainly have considered going."

His friend added, "It is not too late yet and I would certainly like to have you come along for I am sure, after the letters my uncle has written, that you will find a good job, and can make his place your home. You do not have to remain long if you do not like it." This thought impressed Robert, together with the friendly manner of this chance acquaintance, that he felt impelled to go to the wicket to make enquiries as to fare and route.

Being told that he would be obliged to buy a ticket via Metrople, from which several excursion trains would leave that evening, he felt himself almost sub-consciously asking for a ticket, feeling at the same time that an over-ruling power was guiding him, for now he had the money to see him through. A new thrill seemed to pass over him as he returned to his seat, where his new friend congratulated him on his quick action. They then told each other their names, the first link in the formation of what was to be a strong and true friendship. His name was Jimmy Wilson, which made it very easy for Robert to remember. Hearing the announcer call their train, they joined the line leading to it and were soon seated in a car destined to carry them to new scenes and environment.

Several hours later, the time passing quickly in the pleasant discussion of their plans and other mutual interests, Metrople was reached, the very place in which, but a few weeks ago, Mamie had been. Now she was gone and here he was. Robert thought of "The ships that pass in the night", but little time could be given the thought as the stentorian voice of the brakeman announced, "All change cars." A few minutes later, they found themselves in a big bustling waiting-room crowded with people. As the time was short before the train for Western Canada was due to pull out and Robert still had to arrange for his lunches during the trip, he found he had only time to send a couple of postcards to Mamie and his mother, advising them of his changed plans, particulars of which he would write fully at his destination. Altogether there were four harvester trains and Robert seeing so many in them had some misgiving about their ability to find work, mentioning it to Jimmy. He was overheard by another passenger who said, "Why, brother, these are but four of sixteen such trains, and when they have all reached their destination, the people will

be as hard to find as a fly in a spider's web. This seemed incredulous to Robert but he was somewhat comforted when Jimmy told him some of the things his uncle had said of the big farms and vast distances of the prairie country.

Some time later many of the travellers, tired from the day's excitement, were soon curling up in all shapes, some with blankets and pillows, others with only the slatted seats for a bed. Some went on talking or played cards, while a certain number, only happy apparently, when drinking, were making such a noise that every one else trying to sleep was being disturbed. Robert and Jimmy had been trying to sleep for sometime, but as soon as they started to doze, they were awakened with ribald laughter, being made the butt for others' jokes. This they took in good part for some time thinking the roisterers would soon tire. The noise, however, increased, till a tired mother with two small children, who had been awakened several times, asked them if they would please stop, but they only laughed at her. The echo of their voices had not died away before Robert was on his feet, in the aisle, moving toward the gang's ringleader. He asked him if he was not going to comply with the mother's request and in reply received an insulting oath. Like a flash of lightning Robert slapped the fellow so hard in the face that he was knocked from his seat into the aisle. This caused considerable commotion, as several quiet travellers advised further punishment. The one slap, however, was sufficient and quiet prevailed in the car, not only during the night but for the remainder of the trip.

The second day, the train entered the great north country of rocks and trees, picturesque lakes, fed by crystal streams, in which myriads of fish lived, and gambolled in their subterranean nooks. As miles and miles of such country was traversed, Robert's astonishment grew to the point where he started to wonder what use could be made of all this rock and water. His mind centered on the thought that Infinite Wisdom had created it for a wise and useful purpose. On several occasions stops were made at sidings to let other trains through and then the passengers would alight for exercise and to pick the blueberries that grew so profusely. To Robert, the scenic beauty made a great appeal, especially as the north shore of Lake Superior was reached. Here he visioned that in the future it would become a tourist's paradise and that the barren places would reveal a wealth of mineral deposits.

In the early morning of the fourth day, Capitola was reached,

a place that at once gave the impression from its air, so charged with enthusiasm, that it was about to throw off its swaddling clothes and become a great city, for like an uncut diamond, its possibilities were already revealed.

During the several hours' stopover here Jimmy and Robert went sightseeing in the streets and they speculated on what the future of the place could be. They listened to an old-timer telling how only a few score years before, a big bull buffalo, followed by his mates had probably made the first survey of the main street; then had followed the Indian with his cayuse, then the screeching red river cart and, to-day, the electric car. Such was progress.

They were soon aboard again bound for their destination. Across vast tracts of prairie they travelled where great fields of golden grain, here and there, waved in the sunhine or simmered like a molten lake that in places appeared to extend into little cottages and small stables, sometimes partially hidden by bluffs of trees. Or again standing out in the open were what looked like the old-style root-houses they had seen back home. On enquiry they were told that these were also the house of many of the pioneers, being made from about the only commodity the country offered—virgin soil matted together by the tough fibrous roots of prairie grass. The magnitude of distance was the most perplexing, as hour after hour, the train sped on unfolding its panoramic view from the car windows, till, as if in a dream, they both became so absorbed in their own thoughts that some time passed without a word being spoken. The promptings of the inner man drove them to their lunch boxes eventually, and they were soon wolfing down the food they had bought at Capitola. They watched the evening sunset, which was soon followed by a big harvest moon, that had made two-thirds of its circle towards the western sky when they were amazed to hear the brakeman calling out Prairmor as the next stop. This was the name of the station at which they knew they were to leave the train for the uncle's farm. As the train came to a stop and they looked from the window, they saw nothing but an old boxcar with a smoky lantern hung near the door, and decided that they must be only in the yards. When the conductor came into the car shouting the name again and adding, "Boys, this is your station," they stepped from the car on to a cinder walk. Here they noticed a group of men near the door of the car, who appeared to be inspecting five other fellows who

had preceded them. One of the group said, "Bill, they look like a bunch of tenderfoots"—a name given by the older settlers to newcomers and those who do not show ready adaptability. Proceeding past this group they had only gone a short way when a voice called, "Do either of you boys happen to be named Wilson?" To which Jimmy replied, "Yes," believing the speaker to be his uncle. Not having seen him for several years though, he did not remember what he looked like.

They then walked back and were soon given a genial western greeting by the uncle and all the men who asked several questions about their trip. Both of them soon felt they were among friends. Soon the uncle led the way from the station, the others helping to carry the grips towards the hotel, when the former stated, "The neighbor, with whom I came, is waiting for us." The neighbor was Joe Denning to whom they were next introduced. He at once showed that he had been imbibing too freely but he still had the appealing manner and open gesture of the characteristic old-time westerner, who would share his last crust with a needy friend. He grasped each by the hand, saying, "I am damn glad to see you boys, and when old Bob says ye'er friends of his, I am damn sure you're alright." His grip was meant to generate friendship, which the boys felt and appreciated. Joe was a well-built man of forty-five, with a good education, and when properly groomed, was a man of refined appearance, but now with a week's growth on his face, to which was added the dust of three days' cutting with the binder, a shraggy red moustache and a suit of blue striped overalls, which showed, they had not come in contact with soap and water for several moons. His outward appearance was anything but attractive to a stranger, but to Robert, it was not the man that impressed him most, but the thought that the curse of drink was everywhere.

It was only a few minutes later, however, that Joe drove up to the front door of the hotel with a spirited team of horses hitched to a wagon with a high box, where he sat on a spring seat in front. In the wagon there were several boxes containing supplies for themselves and neighbors. These were soon turned into seats for the boys, the uncle and Joe riding on the spring seat. Joe, turning towards them, said, "when you are comfortable, say the word, and we'll go." The word was at once given and the horses were let away at a frisky gait. The rays from the silver moon showed the wheel marks, called a trail, winding in and out, as it were, into

the great beyond, while the pungent smell of ripened grain permeated the air. The roadway appeared to be continually proceeding up hill. While an interesting conversation was carried on to the best possible advantage against the noise from the horses' hoofs, and the wagon wheels, two dark spots, that could be discerned in the distance, broke on the horizon, and were pointed out as their respective homes. Driving up to a partly tumbled-down place, that was made of sods and poles, with a piece of haystack at one end, and a full one at the other, Joe brought the team to a stop, and turning towards the boys, said in a way that conveyed both pride and apology, "Well, boys, we are here, and such as it is, you're damn welcome to make yourselves at home."

The horses were put away and Joe then led the way to the house for a snack of breakfast. On reaching the place called the house, the scene that met their eyes astounded the boys for on entering what had at one time been a doorway, that gave entrance to another one, they found both of them sinking into the earth from the weight of sod above. And there were so many rank weeds that an axe was kept nearby to chop one's way in! The main door had been so hacked to keep it fitting the frame that it left a good runway for the dog or cat. Strewn over the floor, and in a couple of boxes, were numerous empty cans, on top of which several tools, binder canvas and plough shares lay, while a couple of saucy little gophers, blocked from their runway, were making up the side of the wall, causing both boys to jump back, not knowing what they were. The uncle, noticing the boys' action, said, "Don't let these pets of Joe's worry you." The other door, not so deeply embedded, was then opened, leading to the kitchen, dining-room, parlor and bedroom—all in one!

The first things they noticed were the small rays of light from the early morning sun pouring through the small four-pane window and the roughly constructed dining table consisting of a piece of rough board, one end of which was pushed into the sod, while the other end supported by a piece of two-by-four. One end of it, next to the wall, was covered with the weekly papers, a pail of syrup, a pail of jam, part of a salt ham, several cans of corn, tomatoes and raspberries, while the other end was graced with all the dishes the buffet contained. All unwashed, these were shown off in bold relief, by a highly decorated table oilcloth, while in the centre was a small wooden box, holding the condiment

set, consisting of a Blue Ribbon baking-powder tin for salt and Epps cocoa tin for the pepper, with holes pierced in the lid. Two other boards, one on each side, being set on crossed-leg poplar sticks provided the seating accommodation.

Nearby was the bachelor's godsend, a two-hole, low-set stove, so called, because it helped to restore some of the meat that otherwise the collie would have had to bury to make palatable. Its age was shown by layers of grease and grime that had accrued from the overflow of many meals. On one lid, as if to impress its importance, was a tin tea-kettle, and on the other such a large teapot that it conveyed the idea that it was used for heating water for a bath—if a tub had been in sight! Later, it was learned, sufficient tea was brewed in the morning to last all day, in the busy season, so that time would not have to be taken to re-start the fire. In the far corner of the room conspicuously set on a couple of empty boxes was a large galvanized pail, a wash-dish, a coal-oil lamp, and several dirty towels and shirts. The bed, on which they were told to throw their coats, was made up of a few pieces of boards, nailed together in a haphazard fashion, on which lay a cheap spring that gave the idea it was made to protect one from rolling out. As an added luxury an excelsior mattress reposed thereon, covered by several grey harvester blankets and a bright log-cabin quilt indicating many hours of exacting work on the part of somebody's mother. As they put their coats down, they jumped once more as three little striped animals, which looked like chipmunks, chirped saucily and ran away from the bed where they had been banqueting on a slice of dry bread. Up the wall, and around the ledge under the poplar poles, they ran, till an air-hole in the sod was reached, through which they made their exit. "Don't mind them little devils", said Joe, "they see to it that I don't have any dried bread to eat."

Seating themselves on the edge of the bed with some misgivings, the boys quickly noticed the originally designed shelf, which was really the lid of a box driven into the sod wall and on which reposed a cheap alarm clock. Joe, who now showed, by the way he was getting around, that the effects of his drinks were wearing off, was busy breaking up a couple of boxes in which the groceries had come, to make a quick fire before he added a couple of buffalo cakes that were such odd-looking fuel, that Jimmy asked his uncle what kind of a mine they got them from. He was told, with a broad grin that they were a local commodity and picked up in the pasture

field after they had dried, being cattle spoor. The fire soon had the kettle singing a merry tune that brought the big teapot into commission, giving forth a most appetizing odor of good tea. Joe then turned his culinary skill to good account and soon had a big plate of ham and eggs on the table, which, with jam, bread and crackers, and liberal helpings of canned tomatoes and fruit, finally satiated the boys' appetites. Robert felt sure that Cafe La Francais had never served a meal that had touched the spot more acceptably, and that after all, the trials and adversities of life were, more or less, a state of mind, in accordance with the way one faced up to them.

Having eaten well, Joe and the uncle pulled out their pipes, and lighting them, took two of the boxes and pulled them towards the stove, where they would be close enough to the old pail that held the buffalo chips, to use it for a cuspidor. Robert and Jimmy again took seats on the side of the bed. The uncle then commenced to question Jimmy about the friends, but the conversation was soon switched to telling how quickly he had made up his mind about coming west, and how he had met Robert and insisted on his coming along too. Joe, after giving his old briar a couple of hard draws, finally said, "Well, boys, you will never regret it. This is a young man's country, and the man who is willing to work cannot help but achieve success." At this point, the uncle noticing the day was advancing suggested they move along home, but Joe immediately suggested driving them over. Declining his offer and an offer of a drink, although the uncle accepted a small one, the party finally left Joe's and headed for their own homestead nearby.

The boys felt they now understood the real meaning of the song they had both heard, "Out Where the West Begins!"

CHAPTER 13

"What we call talents, may be likened unto an electrical charged battery, they are of use only when we properly connect them with the world."
—Nota Bene.

HALF an hour later, after walking over the crooked prairie trail that in places was not much more than a few wheel marks covered with coarse grass, they came to a small frame house with a lean-to attached. The door was opened quickly by the uncle, as he shouted, "Mary, I have brought you home two boys." At this, all the family came forward and were quickly introduced by the uncle, saying, "Jimmy, I don't suppose you have forgotten your Aunt Mary? And this is a friend of Jimmy's Mary, Robert Benson." The family, which consisted of the mother, Mary, William, the son, about the same age as the boys, and Marjorie, a strong, robust girl of seventeen, whose innate beauty was quite perceptible to Robert, at once gave them a warm welcome. Before the day had passed, Marjorie found many things of interest to discuss with Robert, while her father, mother and William discussed the friends back home.

The Wilson home at once made its appeal to Robert as it indicated the presence of those sterling qualities he had always looked upon as promoting happiness; love of God, thrift and contentment with one's lot. It reminded him of his own home in early childhood. The most of the first day and the next were spent in writing letters, pleasant conversation, looking over the farm, and watching Mr. Wilson try out a new binder, in order that everything would be in readiness for Monday morning, when he expected his wheat would be ready. This thought, combined with two good nights' rest in comfortable feather beds, at once started the germ of Western fever working. On Sunday morning, Mrs. Wilson stated that the family always attended church, Presbyterian service being held every two weeks in the schoolhouse about two miles away, and would be very pleased to have the boys come along. Robert, quite enthused with the suggestion, replied at once, as though speaking for himself and Jimmy, "There is nothing that would

please us better." Robert then said it had always been his mother's wish that he go to church regularly, and that he had always found much pleasure in doing so. With these words, each one assumed the responsibility of doing some of the chores that had to be attended to first. William took on the job of getting the team out and hitched to the democrat, with which the drive was made through fields of grain, around sloughs and a stretch called the highway, which to Robert appeared more like a great maze.

The school was soon reached, where the word of God was expounded with kindly reverence, and His praises sung with many a guttural sound, but all of which was done in a spirit of understanding and friendship for those present were not there to criticize each others' voices but to worship God in a simple way. To Robert this sincerity reminded him of the last service he had attended back home almost a year ago, as he sang an old familiar hymn with such zeal and gusto in his deep baritone voice that several of those in front rows had an excuse to cough in order to turn around to see who was doing the singing. Others let their fingers slip from the page and then looked confused as they tried to find the place again. The service over, it now seemed that the most important part of the gathering was to take place as everyone turned to greet those nearest them, with such exclamations as:

"Oh, bless my soul, if it isn't Mrs. Jones. How are all the little ones? How is Sam; I heard he was not feeling the best. George is starting cutting tomorrow. Bill has seventy-five acres of his summer-fallow down. Did you hear Mrs. Ardmore had a new arrival? Mrs. McTavish said it weighs eleven pounds—just imagine that for a start."

The minister, by this time had joined the members of his flock and was entering heartily into the conversation, seeming to have some special and personal word for everyone. Marjorie was taking considerable pride in introducing Jimmy and Robert, as her cousin and his friend, from the east, till Robert soon felt he had met more people than during all the time he had been elbowing with thousands in the great city of Demoralburg. And how friendly and warm-hearted they all appeared to be, each one inviting them to pay a visit! Some of their dresses were by no means of the latest cut, while others were in new, striped overalls, but within each, was a human heart, that in the world of hard knocks, had been refined like pure gold. Among those who came forward to meet them was an attractive girl of twenty, whose dress bore the

appearance of being a little better and more outstanding than any of the others. They learned later that she was the teacher. As she approached, with the lady with whom she boarded, Marjorie made a quick turn as if, all at once, she was specially interested in something at the far side of the building. Her real intention was to allow them to pass without giving them an introduction. Her mother, noting this conspicuous breach of etiquette while talking to a neighbor, turned and made the introduction.

With the usual introductory remarks over, the discussion soon settled down to the all-important topic, the harvest, help and yield. Some outstanding ideas were given by different ones, who stated with an air of confidence, that they believed their wheat would go forty bushels to the acre; others stated the crop was so heavy that they could only take half a swath with the binder, while another, with a Yankee accent, was heard to remark that his oxen were so damn slow he would have to buy some h'osses if he was ever going to get through. But the greatest worry appeared to be getting sufficient help to harvest it, especially when Mr. Wilson told of having been into town to meet the two boys and only five harvesters had left the train at Prairmor.

Alex McKay, who until now had been standing on the outer circle, at once, with the usual foresight and shrewdness, that had made his race famous, edged his way over to the boys, and having already been introduced by Mrs. Wilson, opened up conversation by asking how they liked the west, but hardly gave them time to reply before he said, "I suppose you boys have your muscles all set to get at the stooking." At this both replied that they felt quite fit to give it a turn, to which Mac replied, "Well, I have a hundred acres cut, and would like to get you boys to come over to-morrow and start stooking it up for me; as it looks as if your uncle will not have much ready before the end of the week, and as I live only a mile and a half from his place, I shall call over this afternoon and see you again." As if afraid that they might offer some excuse, he turned quickly and was gone.

As they drove back to the Wilson home, Robert was trying to solve in his mind whether it would be right to hire on Sunday with Mr. McKay if he came over. He felt he did not want to take any undue advantage of the hospitality that the Wilsons offered so generously. Jimmy, thinking along the same lines, mentioned to William that Mr. McKay had told them he was coming over in the afternoon to see if he could hire them to stook. At this William

replied, "The old skinflint, playing his usual game—even going to church to do it!" His mother said, "Now, Willie, you know Mr. McKay is alright in his way." "Yes, if that way is for McKay" remarked Marjorie.

Dinner was barely over before Mr. Wilson, looking from the window, saw McKay or Mac, the name he was best known by among the neighbors, coming down the road, seated in his old buckboard, and pushing on the lines, as was his habit when driving his mustang. He quickly informed the boys that they need be in no hurry about hiring. As there was lots of work, and men very scarce, wages would likely be pretty good. They should take a few days and get rested up, by which time they could start in on some wheat he had cut and get seasoned a little to the work, as it would be pretty stiff to start on. Hardly had he finished talking before Mac had stopped before the door and quickly intimated his wishes as he said, "Well boys, I suppose I can count on your coming back with me, as Bob will not need you around here, the way his crop is coming in." The boys felt that Mr. Wilson had the first claim on them, but as his crop was not yet ready and Mac cited several reasons why he would like to have them go back with him, so that he could get at the stooking in the morning, they agreed to go over for the week at least. They would walk across the fields in the evening, they said. Mac was delighted, but with usual canniness, said he would take their clothes over now fearing they might change their minds.

That evening, as the sun, a great ball of fire, illuminated the whole western horizon with its reddish beams, the two boys, in great speculation as to what the future held in store for them, after some of the things Marjorie and William had said about the way their new host did things, were quickly approaching a large, red painted barn and good-sized granary nearby, while some distance to the side was a one-storey building, unpainted, about half the size of the granary. That was, no doubt, the house. These comprised the buildings of Alex McKay, the owner of three sections of the best land in the district, two sections of which were under cultivation, the other in raw prairie.

By the time they had reached the door of the house, Mac, who had been scanning the near cut across the fields shortly after he had returned, saw them coming, so he was at the door to greet them. They were quickly introduced to the other two men, Jack and Bill, and shown their bed, which was one of three, at the end

of the shack, with just room enough to squeeze in sideways to get into it. The interior of the shack was covered with light building paper, and did not altogether create a homelike impression. The first bed, they were soon to learn, belonged to Mac, with a large-faced alarm clock standing on a small shelf beside it. This alarm never actually rang owing to the fact that Mac was always up an hour or more earlier, no matter at what hour it was set.

The deepening shadows soon gave notice that another day was about to end, and that the next move was to bed. During the short conversation, Mac, no doubt, intentionally forgot to light the lamp, as oil cost money, but Jack, having grown accustomed to the life, said, "Well, as to-morrow will be another long day, I guess we'll turn in," at which the others took the hint, although by no means sleepy. Due to their health and the buoyancy of youth, though, they were soon many leagues in dreamland. Robert was sure he had only nicely got to sleep, when a loud reveille was heard as the dawning light of another day was breaking.

Mac intentionally rattled the frying pan on the stove as if trying to keep the heavy strips of fat bacon from burning, but this practice, they learned later from Jack, was Mac's introductory way of making the call to arms. The boys were soon up and dressed and just ready to try out the culinary art of their new cook when the alarm clock went off, showing the hour to be four-thirty! Jack and Bill, having gone out to feed the horses, were now returning, and a few minutes later all sat in to breakfast, which was to be the boys' first meal under bachelor preparation. It consisted of a large plate of oatmeal porridge, bacon, potatoes with their jackets on, bread, syrup and jam. Mac's nervous manner showed how fast his mind was working in an effort to ensure that no time would be lost in getting to the fields. The rate of wages was quickly agreed upon, and then, almost on a dog trot, Mac hurried away to the binders, giving the boys their instructions as to where to start. Jack and Bill were left to bring out the horses. Reaching a field, which might more appropriately have been called a farm, with its continuous rows of sheaves, the boys thought it presented more the appearance of a lake of gold with the rows of sheaves like ebbing waves. As they surveyed its size (it contained a half-section of three hundred and twenty acres) they at once began to figure how long it would take them to go around it. As Jimmy looked at his watch, showing twenty minutes to six, he said, "Robert, fancy

starting to stook at this hour, before even the bee has the dew out of his eyes!"

They started into the work with considerable more enthusiasm than experience, and soon had several rows across the fields, to Mac's admiring gaze, as he made his first round of the field. This speed they kept up till about nine o'clock, when the warm rays of the sun commenced to be felt, and a hollow feeling in their stomachs and several kinks in their backs, made them commence to conjecture, if it was not about noon. As it was only just after nine o'clock they had to satisfy themselves with a drink of water apiece and a little application of the Coue system. They felt considerably refreshed then and were back at their row when the binders again chugged by. From now on, however, each sheaf seemed to be farther away and harder to pick up, and by the time the binders again came around, they were not sure if they could stick it out much longer. Remembering what one of the men had said at the station, about tenderfeet, they decided that they were going to stick it out if they never did anything else, and felt sure that when Mac came round again, it would be time to unhitch. Once more though, the binder passed them, apparently throwing out on the bundle carrier three sheaves for every one they picked. This again made them think there was poor chance of them ever catching up to the binders, as they had figured they would be able to when they started on, what looked a narrow strip. Another weary hour passed and once again the binders were coming down to the end. As Mac, who was in the lead, came to the corner, he pulled out of the grain and commenced to unhitch the horses. As he did so, they both visibly brightened, believing that the hour of their salvation was at hand. But, as he drove away without saying anything, they began to feel that all hope was gone. As they looked towards the buildings they were surprised to see that Mac was already there and was now busy chasing down a large plymouth-rock rooster. As soon as he succeeded in catching it he waved the boys in.

So keen were they to leave their tiring job that it was only fifteen minutes later before they were enjoying a big plateful of chicken soup. How Mac had dressed the bird and had it cooked in that time, remained a dark secret, and one they had no desire to investigate, being quite satisfied with the appetizing dish, for never had a chicken tasted better. When it came time to get up from the table, the boys' muscles had become so contracted and

stiff that it was like bending back an iron band to stand up again, and the thought of going back to work seemed to be almost out of the question. However, Mac, knowing how they felt from what they had said gave them a bit of advice, "Boys, he said, you had better go a little steadier this afternoon, for stooking when you are not used to it, is hard work, and you must accustom yourselves gradually." This was some encouragement, but they were quite assured he had stated the fact as, although both had done the work before, the sheaves they had handled were like toys compared to the big butt ends that the Massey binder pushed off. Again back in the field, the first two hours did not seem so bad, but from then on, it was very exhausting and once more they about decided that it was out of the question to finish the day's work.

As Mac had poured some oatmeal in the water jug, they had a good drink, which refreshed them considerably, and as some of the stiffness was passing away, they commenced to feel some easier, continuing with the work till eight o'clock, in order to make as good a showing as possible, the teams having quit about seven. Once again, seated at the supper table, they began to feel their muscles becoming stiffer than ever, and were so tired that they took but very little part in the conversation, mostly about cutting and the horses. As soon as they were through, they lay down on the bed and immediately fell asleep. Next morning a lot of effort by Mac was required before they were fully awakened. With breakfast over and enroute to the field, Robert could not help but compare these laborious duties with only small wages to the lighter work and heavier pay he had received at the Cafe La Francais! He began to wonder why it was that the straight and narrow path, as taught by Christians, led one through such trials, if behind everything was a God of love. It appeared that most of the advantages, pleasures and money in life were enjoyed by those who looked on the "straight and narrow" with utter indifference. But, remembering his early teachings, and that doubt was the first step that led away from truth and eternal life, he endeavoured to cast the thought from his mind.

In this way the first three days passed, each one requiring all the courage they could bring forth to see it through. But from then on, the work seemed much easier, and when Saturday night came, they felt they were now fully initiated westerners. On Sunday morning they decided they would go over to Wilson's, as Mrs. Wilson had extended them a most cordial invitation to make the

place their home. There was a desire in Robert's mind too, the meaning of which was hardly clear to himself, but he knew that to spend the day there would be the source of considerable pleasure. Although he had found Marjorie attractive, and very interesting company, still he could not conceive that she could, in any way, take the place of Mamie in his life. He had been thinking of her so much during the past week, especially reflecting on her surprise when she received his letter, telling of his coming out West, and that she would be counting the time till he returned to her. Still he had to admit to himself that there was something about this healthy, typical country girl, Marjorie, with more than the average good looks, who dressed in fashionable clothes, would have been considered beautiful, which definitely attracted him. She gave evidence, too, of a passionate disposition. Still he was confident that she could never take the place in his affections which Mamie held, so he felt quite justified in returning her friendship.

Before going to Wilson's it was necessary, not only to shave off the week's growth of whiskers, but to remove some of the large scales of sunburn, which were much more conspicuous than the whiskers. Going to a window on the side of which hung a strop, Robert was about to put the edge of his razor in shape, when on moving back the curtain, his attention was at once drawn to what he thought was an odd tracing of grain in the wood. It did not altogether harmonize with the rest, which was stained dirty brown with smoke and grease. As he was about to have a better look, moving the curtain farther away, he began to wonder if the work had also affected his eyes, as the grain appeared to be moving in front of him. At this, he excitedly called it to Jack's attention. On turning around to see what the trouble was he laughed loudly as he said, "My God, boy, that's Mac's possessing army, ten thousand strong, and if it was not for the fact that you two come so near being dead when you go to sleep, you would now be well acquainted with their mode of attack." The boys, who had never knowingly seen a bed-bug before, were then given a little of their history by the well-travelled Jack. When he was through, the boys were not long on deciding, that if they remained here any longer, their beds would be transferred to the stable-loft, where the new-mown hay was much more inviting.

They spent a most enjoyable day with the Wilson's, as after having a sumptuous dinner there, the team was hitched up to the

democrat and they all went over to some neighbors, by the name of Johnson, about two miles away, where the teacher, to whom Marjorie had tried to be so inconsiderate, boarded. To-day the circumstances greatly altered her feelings toward her, as she soon noted that Jimmy was showing her marked attention. When they left, Marjorie invited her to go home with them after church the next Sunday and spend the day, no doubt, having the idea in mind that, while she entertained Jimmy, she herself could much less conspicuously spend the time with Robert!

CHAPTER 14

"Of all earthly music that touches most deeply the chords of life, is the music extolled from a loving heart."—Nota Bene.

THE next three weeks saw the last of the sheaves in position on Mac's place and at the Wilson's, where they spent three days stooking. They now had a feeling of confidence in themselves as stookers and they also knew that Mac was greatly pleased with the service they had given. Sunday was eagerly awaited by the four young people.

Marjorie and Robert were both beginning to realize that there was a mutual feeling between them that was more than just friendly interest. The girls now made it a point to arrange something by way of entertainment for each Sunday. This Sunday, Mac, who had been to town, brought back the first letters they had yet received, Robert's being in answer to those he had sent off shortly after his arrival. The letters were from his mother and Mamie, who expressed great surprise at the sudden change he had made, but closed with expressions of how pleased they would be when the next few months had passed and he would be home again with them.

Stacking was now the order of the day, owing to a scarcity of machines for the work. At first this was a pleasant change to stooking, but when it came to topping off the stack with the last two loads, it required all the brawn and strength one possessed to throw up the well-filled sheaves from ten to twenty feet, especially against a strong breeze that always seemed to blow on the wrong side of the stack, making the task twice as difficult. They were once more forced to the conclusion that it was no wonder newcomers were dubbed tenderfeet, when work of this kind had to be done from daylight to dark, for union hours then had not been instituted. As it was a case of just so much time and so little help, every hour had to count. Two weeks of stacking had been put in when Sunday came round. Again the boys realized clearly what a blessing this day of rest meant.

They were again enjoying dinner at the Wilson home, when

a buggy drove into the yard carrying a Mr. and Mrs. Adams from Prairior. Mr. Adams was the implement agent, or more properly termed, the Massey-Harris expert, which title was often given anyone having enough knowledge to know which side a bolt should be placed in a binder.

Mr. Wilson and Mr. Adams soon returned from the stable and immediately sat in to the table. During the ensuing conversation about the help situation, Mr. Adams remarked that his brother, running a general store at Badgerton about a hundred miles further west, had been trying hard to get a clerk. "This is your chance Robert" quipped Jimmy, "it will sure be easier than stacking!" Mr. Adams was at once interested, asking the boys if they had any experience. On Robert stating that he had, he at once asked him if he was not engaged with Mr. Wilson, whether he would consider it. If he would, he'd write his brother at once. But Marjorie said, "I don't think you would like it up there, Robert, it is only a new district that has been opened up by a few homesteaders." "Yes, but the place has grown considerable during the past summer and three carloads of binders had been sold there during the harvest" said Mr. Adams. However, Robert suggested that Mr. Adams might write his brother anyhow, and if the position was still open, he would consider it.

As the four young people had planned a trip to a small lake, about six miles distant, they soon left without anything more being said, except that as they drove off, Mr. Adams asked Robert not to make any further plans for a few days, until he heard from his brother. Robert assured him he would not. The trip to the lake made a very pleasant drive, and although they didn't bathe, having no bathing suits, they enjoyed the outing immensely.

The Friday following, Robert received a letter direct from Mr. Adams at Badgerton, stating that he would like him to accept the position. He had written his brother asking him to get him into town the next Sunday, so that he could take Monday's train. Feeling quite elated at this seemingly good luck, he told Jimmy, who, although regretting very much the severance of those close bonds of friendship that had grown up so quickly between them, said, "Well, Robert, I hate to see you go and will miss you very much, but still it may be too good a chance to miss, and anyhow, another six weeks will soon pass, when if we go home, we shall meet again." Mac was then told of his new plans, but as the stacking was getting pretty well done, he just congratulated him,

there being no need to ask him to stay on. He was sorry he was leaving the district though. The next day the boys decided to get shaved and go over to the Wilson's for the night, owing to Robert's likely departure on the morrow.

On reaching the house they greeted Mrs. Wilson and Marjorie, who were busy washing up the supper dishes. Jimmy at once blurted out the news about Robert and his plans. Mrs. Wilson at once congratulated him, but Marjorie was obviously displeased as she said, "Surely Robert, you are not going away up there where nobody lives!" He then confirmed the news, confident that it was a better move for him. In her anxiety to secure what happiness she could, however, she forgot for the time what his parting was going to mean, and made the evening so pleasant that both often looked back to those fleeting hours, as one of the bright spots in their lives, because of that exultant feeling love seems to enthrone in their hearts. But the next afternoon soon arrived, when, in accordance with his brother's request, Mr. Adams arrived to take Robert into town. In a spirit of fortitude and calm the farewells were made till it came to Marjorie, who, clasping Robert's hand tenderly, had only managed to say, "Good-bye, Robert, you will write as soon. . .?" and feeling the warm pressure of his hand, as he said, "I certainly will," before she broke down completely and hurried away to her room.

The next day, after several hours' ride on the train through almost perfectly flat country with hardly a tree in sight and the homes of settlers becoming more scattered, Badgerton was announced by the trainman. Robert was at once aroused, trying to see from the window what the place looked like, but all that met his view was four large elevators in the distance. When the train came to a stop, he stepped from the car to the cinder-made platform, where he noticed a number of young men standing around, who, from their dress, he judged to be farmers. He was soon met, however, by a man whom he at once recognized from his similarity in appearance to Mr. Adams in Prairymor, as his brother. He was shaken warmly by the hand with a real western grip and then introduced to the young men nearby as his new clerk. By this time the train had pulled out and Robert had a full view of Main Street which proved to be but a duplicate, in general aspect, of many others, with the usual livery barn, blacksmith shop, implement agencies, a couple of stores and a hotel. One of the stores was the Badgerton Supply Company, where, in future,

he was to gain a varied experience. This made up one side of the street, while the other indicated the prosperity of the district, with four elevators and a side street running off it. This was supposed to be the residential part of the town and contained a few one-storey houses, or more correctly, shacks, most of them unpainted. At the end of this street was a nicely painted building of modern design, being the school, which was also used for church services and public meetings.

As they reached the store Mr. Adams opened the door, displaying a large room with unpainted walls, in which all classes of goods appeared to have been thrown from the doorway into a heap in the centre. Behind one of the counters stood a woman of average height and pleasing appearance who was introduced as Mrs. Adams. She greeted Robert most cordially, glad to know that his experienced help in the store would allow her to get back to her housework, neglected perforce, for the last month. As she excused herself to get supper, Mr. Adams questioned Robert on his impression of the West, laughing heartily as he was told of his first experiences. By this time supper was ready and they all sat down together, the store being locked. This was not a customary thing though, for Adams' store was looked upon as the place you could get anything almost any time, usually staying open till ten or eleven every night. Supper was considerably extended as Mr. Adams spoke of his work and the store of which Robert was to take charge. As cashier for the elevators, paying out many thousands of dollars over the fall months, he had found it impossible to give the store the attention it required, Mr. Adams explained. The insistent ringing of the bell by someone fully intent on getting into the store caused him to hurry away. Mrs. Adams continued the conversation, stating that having no family they had decided to have Robert room with them, owing to conditions at the hotel not being of the best. His room, he noted, contained a bed, such as he had back home, and a small dresser. By the time he had set out his clothes, the table had been cleared and he and Mr. Adams went in to the store, where plans were entered into for new arrangement of the stock. So quickly had the time passed that they had not considered the hour, till a belated bachelor, coming in for a plug of tobacco and loaf of bread, asked if they had started to keep open all night. The time being twelve-thirty they then closed up.

The following morning, long before it had been the custom for

Main Street to show any signs of life, Robert, with broom in hand, and filled with enthusiasm, was on the job, as it seemed to him that a half day had passed, so accustomed had he become to Mac's reveille before sunrise! His first task was to clean up the counters and get some of the goods properly placed, as the jumbled heap, as it lay now, had groceries, hardware, harness, dishes, binder repairs, patent medicines, sugar and salt all mixed together.

Two hours' work made some slight impression when a call to breakfast was heard from upstairs. Mrs. Adams and her husband both appreciated him getting to work so early, but Robert explained this as a habit picked up with his last employer. By the time the meal was over, both employer and employee had sold themselves to each other, convinced of each other's unquestionable integrity. Mr. Adams was of a jovial, good-natured disposition, who, through his pioneer experiences, had lost every vestige of parsimony or selfishness he might have had. He was still on this side of forty-five.

It was some two weeks later, working early and late, before he had the stock properly arranged, but his work made such a difference in the appearance of the store that all the customers remarked about it. He was surprised at the class of people he met, some with university degrees, many from good homes in the old lands; victims of wanderlust; Black sheep, (now called re-mittance men) who had not lived up to the standard of their homes; and sent out to this new world to be re-modelled. Most of them now holding down homesteads; and becoming successful farmers, with that exemplary standard of friendship, that was as reliable as iron bands. An outstanding example was John D. McNab, known among his neighbors as Sandy. This nickname had been given him because of his shraggy, untrimmed beard, which made him look ten years older than he really was. Actually he was this side of thirty-five, of strong athletic build, showing plainly the heritage of his highland ancestors. He had a magnetic personality and a fluency of language with which he could discuss any topic of the day, especially religion. On the latter subject his views were so unorthodox that he had been called queer, more for the reason that his views were so entirely antagonistic to the generally accepted creeds of the district, especially Presbyterian, to which most were credited with being attached, than because his arguments were not convincing or logical. For this reason, it appeared he was unable to hold the friendship of most of

his neighbors, but, his financial and moral standing and charitable inclinations stood without question. He was also known to be well-educated and a voracious reader and the possessor of a section of land, one mile from town, on which stood a large barn and neat cottage with hedges of trees planted around. He also possessed some of the best Clyde horses in the district, and full complement of implements, all of which had been gathered since he had homesteaded four years ago. Others who had arrived several years before him were still living in sod shacks. His secret was thrift, industry and good judgment. It was during Robert's first week in the store that Sandy came in for his usual weekly order. With business courtesy Robert opened up a conversation with him which was to be the beginning of a valued and lasting friendship. Though not given much to talking with strangers, something about Robert's manner seemed to fascinate him, partially melting his habitual reserve, as Mrs. Adams remarked to Robert after he had left.

Threshing season was now in full swing, and although machines were scarce, many loads of golden grain were daily delivered to the elevators, keeping the managers there busy from morning till late at night. The owners or drivers of these loads brought many rush orders to the store, placing them as they passed by, and expecting to have them filled by the time they had dumped their load at the elevators, so that no time would be lost in getting back to the machines. It also soon became known through the town gossip-monger, Mrs. Brady, who had overheard it remarked by Mrs. Adams, that Robert had been connected with the church in the east. Before the second week had been passed he had been interviewed by the choir leader asking him to become a member, and by the minister with a view to him becoming a teacher in the Sabbath school he was trying to organize. Robert being desirous of assisting in the work as far as possible accepted both jobs of work. This obliged him to change to the Presbyterian creed, but he found very little difference, he said.

He also felt obliged to write three letters each week. One was to Marjorie, which he always did with a feeling of embarrassment, not wishing to say anything to break the true feelings of friendship he had for her, but still not wishing to have her misunderstand his feelings beyond that. The other two letters, of course, were to his mother and Mamie. In this way, two months had sped around like a dream. Two more weeks and his already extended ticket

would expire. What was he to do? Here was opportunity, contentment, and a call to his patriotism to remain and help to develop the country's great resources. But back east was the call of home and love, pulling so strongly on his heart strings. One must be sacrificed. Which was it to be? To make the decision more difficult, a letter from Jimmy was received in which he stated, he had become so attracted to the West and its opportunities he had taken up a homestead about ten miles from the Wilson's, but intended spending Christmas with them. He trusted that Robert would make it a point to come down as Mrs. Wilson had stated she had included an invitation in Marjorie's letter, which he had also received. It was the last words of the letter that caused him to think most—"I don't expect you will throw up a good job to go back East." Jimmy was right; they had both come west seeking opportunities. Here his was being extended with bountiful hands. Why run away? Would it not be showing more moral courage and true love to stay out here and build up a home than go back East for the sake of what might prove only a transient pleasure which want would soon destroy? Too true were the words, "When poverty comes in the door, love flies out of the window." Many times were these thoughts debated in his mind, and each night he appealed to God in prayer, for his guidance. The decision came most unexpectedly after Robert had been worrying for a week. Mr. Adams approached him one morning and said, "Robert, I know your time will be up in another week in accordance with our agreement, and I have now come to ask you to remain indefinitely, and in appreciation of the efficient service you have given, your salary will be increased twenty-five dollars per month. I may also add that Mrs. Adams and I have been considering a trip East after Christmas, and would like you to take charge of the store."

Taken completely by surprise, but firmly believing that this was the Divine answer to his prayer, the offer was at once accepted and the peace that comes from the feeling of having done right, both in sight of God and man, was like a seal to the agreement. Having this problem settled, letters were written home and to Mamie, giving in detail the reason for his decision, which he felt sure they would understand. He also wrote to Jimmy and to Marjorie, in whose letter he enclosed an acceptance to Mrs. Wilson's kind offer to spend Christmas, if at all possible.

With this done, every effort was put forth to keep up with the constantly increased business, that came from the processions of loaded wagons that daily wended their way from all directions, that kept a stream of golden grain flowing into the elevators. In return for the grain the farmers received from five hundred to two thousand dollars a day, a great deal of which was returned to the Badgerton Supply Company for supplies. Many times, as large boxes of merchandise were delivered, Robert thought what a difference for value received he was now giving compared to what he had had to give at the Cafe La Francais!

CHAPTER 15

"The four great highways to success are decision, work, honesty, and determination, but they cross at right angles and that place is perseverance."—Nota Bene.

THE bright halcyon days of September and October with their wonderful early morning mirages outlining their phantom cities and lakes in what looked to be enchanted country, were now giving way to the short days of November with its bleak biting winds. These were to act as a warning to the settlers to prepare for the cold Nor'westers just over the way, and the long winter when Jack Frost would reign king over the great western prairie, but bringing with him, however, the time for pleasure and recreation in the form of curling and winter sports for old and young. Robert Brown, the implement agent, always first to lead the town in progressive ideas and an enthusiastic booster to boot, conceived the idea that the town should have a rink, and at once called a meeting to discuss ways and means, to be held in his office. A few nights later, practically every citizen was present and the meeting had hardly opened when a motion was made that a subscription list be opened with an objective of eight hundred dollars for the purpose of building the lower section of the rink with a lean-to for curling. The roof and other extras to be held over for another year. The resolution was at once passed unanimously and practically the full amount subscribed.

Two weeks later, with considerable assistance given graciously, it was completed and a splendid sheet of ice for both skating and curling was prepared for the opening night, for which the committee arranged a special programme. The success of this could best be gauged from the big crowd of old and young that attended, many of whom had never had skates on or thrown a stone before. Although it was a case of "now up and now down" nothing daunted the skaters and curlers or detracted from their genuine enjoyment throughout the winter months, even if several carried for many days the mementos of their falls! Many who could not take a stroke at the beginning wound up the season by cutting out

the figure eight. From the first, the rink proved to be the mecca for healthful, mirthful diversion, where many, who could not take a prominent part at dances, now proved to be the best skaters. With the proverbial slogan of the west, "Jack is as good as his master, and a damn sight better," friendship reigned supreme for to act in a slighting or high-hatted manner was an unpardonable disgrace.

Attendance at the rink soon showed its magnetic influence on church meetings and card parties. The dance, however, which never seemed to wane for any length of time with the younger generation, specially in country districts, still held its own, but with eight to ten bachelors present for every prima-donna, as they were looked upon. Many of the men, through environment and bashfulness, were perpetual wallflowers, often returning to their fireless cabins with heavy hearts. At the dances, Robert always made it a point to dance with the married women, much to the disappointment of some of their daughters, whose idea of a good time was to secure the attention of the new clerk. The weeks passed by quickly for Robert, till Christmas was once again almost at the threshold. Owing to the way business had increased Robert felt very reluctant about asking time off for the promised trip to his friends. He kept putting this off till but three days remained, when, spurred by the short time remaining, he approached Mr. Adams, who replied in such nonchalant tones that he was left almost speechless. He said, "I am pleased you mentioned it, as I have felt for some time that you should have a few holidays. They make us all feel better. It will be quite alright to go, as requested, and you may remain till the third of January. When you return, Mrs. Adams and I have decided to make that trip East I mentioned before. I had also overlooked telling you that I have engaged Miss Raymore to assist you while we are away. She was to start January the second but with the rush of the past week, I have decided it would be well to have her come at once, so that she will be here and help while you are away." The pleasure of receiving such a courteous answer made the next three days like part of the holiday but he managed to express his feelings adequately.

The day before Christmas Robert was on the train, filled with anticipation of many days of fun with his friends. He would think of the gifts he had brought and wonder if they would suit, especially the one for Marjorie! He also wondered what attitude

he should adopt. He must not deceive a friend, but to tell her his feelings on such occasion would not be using discretion. Unable to decide on anything definite, he found the time had passed so quickly that he was nearing Prairior. Stepping from the train, the first thing that caught his attention was the new station, instead of the old box car, nicely painted in tones of chocolate red. As he viewed it, he heard a familiar voice saying, "Oh, Robert, we are glad you have come. Merry Christmas!" The speaker was Marjorie, who at the same time was extending her hand, having run on ahead of the rest of the family, which had all come to town to do Christmas shopping.

Two hours later, after a pleasant drive in the cold, crisp air, in the high box sleigh, they reached home, just as the sun was making its adieu, leaving behind a hoary haze that indicated a real cold night ahead. But once inside, with a good fire roaring from the stove, the severity of the weather was forgotten in arranging and then partaking of the big dinner, everyone doing it ample justice! During the evening Robert told them of his experiences, to which they listened with the greatest sympathetic interest till at last the old clock on the mantle tolled the midnight hour. At this time Mr. and Mrs. Wilson went to bed leaving Marjorie and Robert to pin up the decorations, as Jimmy and William knowingly took themselves off to bed also!

Robert soon found himself stretching out a number of bright garlands, while Marjorie directed the work and drove the tacks in. The third garland had to be attached in a corner, under which reposed, most invitingly, an old-fashioned couch with turned-up ends, on which she stood to drive the tacks. As Robert reached it to her, it somehow happened, as it has happened before, under similar circumstances, that the wrong nail was hit. Marjorie found herself nursing an injured finger while silently inviting Robert's sympathy and attention. He was at once at her side with words of consolation, while unthinkingly, his arm had passed behind her shoulders. As it did, the shooting pain caused her to fall back closer into his arm, giving him the first realization of where it actually rested! He did not wish to show any lack of consciousness of a pleasing thrill himself, as she looked into his face, with a coy but assuring smile, as he heard her say, "My finger is paining so much that I don't think we can finish the work to-night." As her hair brushed his cheek, his arm at once tightened about her and he found himself saying, "There will be lots of time to do it in the

morning," as they somehow found themselves subsiding onto the conveniently placed couch. As if to guard against the weather that was so cold, there was added inclination to snuggle a little closer, till, as if the spirit of good will had entered the house, the coal-oil lamp, sitting on the table nearby, gave a couple of blinks, as if to add. "A Merry Christmas," and went out, leaving only a reddened but dying wick to mark the place where the light had been. Marjorie's first impulse was to get some oil, but then, remembering it had not been brought in from the sleigh, was questioning herself what to do, when Robert, quickly coming to the rescue said, "We don't need it anyhow, now that we are not going to finish the decorations."

From that time on the seventh heaven of bliss was entered and time must have taken the wings of an eagle, for the only conscious thought remaining on their minds was that in some way their lips had met in the darkness. It wasn't till they heard the mournful howl of a coyote that Marjorie, going to the window and pulling back the blind, was astonished to see the first signs of breaking day. Both of them went to their beds, Marjorie to reflect on the happiness of dreams come true, and Robert to wonder if it were possible to love two girls at the same time!

Next morning, after some general joshing of Robert and Marjorie about the unfinished Xmas decorations by the family, it was agreed the boys would finish them while Marjorie assisted her mother in preparing the dinner, to which the teacher and several other friends had been invited. Two hours later, with the aroma of turkey and plum-pudding permeating the room, the guests arrived, bringing with them an abundance of good cheer. They sat themselves down to the well-assorted dinner that Mrs. Wilson's culinary art had made so appetizing, and to which the sharpened appetites soon did ample justice, after which Jimmy distributed the gifts so prominently displayed on the tree. The balance of the afternoon was spent with music and singing many of the old time songs that never grow old. The evening being given over to games and dancing, provided the opportunity of pairing off for private tete-a-tetes, till too soon, the time gave notice that another Christmas with all its cherished greetings and joy had passed into history. A tasty snack was then served, and plans made for entertainment during the coming week. Marjorie gave notice that she wanted New Year's Eve, in honor of her guests. Every night was soon set apart, making the week that followed one continuous banquet

and round of pleasure with the exception of one, when a skating party arranged to be held in a nearby slough was cancelled owing to a cold Nor'wester.

New Year's Eve arrived bright and clear and by the time all the guests had arrived at the Wilson home, there was hardly seating capacity. By moving several pieces of furniture outside and with a little crowding on the side, floor space was soon made for dancing, with the musicians at once taking their places, and getting everyone away to good start, by playing popular old-time waltzes, that quickly brought everyone to their feet. It so happened that Robert, who was standing near the teacher, turned and asked her to have the first dance with him, and being a graceful dancer they at once created favorable comment amongst those looking on from the side. Overheard by Marjorie, her evening, to which she had so much looked forward, was almost ruined, as she believed that the teacher was infatuated with him and that he also had been attracted to her because she was the best-dressed girl at the party.

As there were no further acts that could at all be looked upon with suspicion, and he gave her the most of his attention for the rest of the dance, Robert found himself back in favour. The party proved a big success, with everyone so thoroughly enjoying themselves that it was with a spirit of reluctancy that they left for their homes as the dawn of another day was breaking, a day that ushered in the New Year with its good wishes, new resolutions and opportunities.

All the family but Mr. Wilson, who stayed up to do the chores were soon in their beds where they remained till noon hour, only to rise and plan for a party at another neighbor's about ten miles distant. New Year's afternoon soon sped by and once again seated in the big sleigh with Robert by her side, his arm snugly around her waist to hold the robe in place, Marjorie became lost in thought on how wonderful love was, making the world such a different place to live in. Two more days, she thought, and like a dream it would have passed, but still remain a cherished memory.

The next night, which was Robert's last, came quickly, and Marjorie, with her plans well-laid, was looking forward to spending the most of it with Robert alone. But, the best laid plans . . . ! With so many parties being held she felt that they had never had enough time together to share each others' confidences, and she longed to hear those words she felt sure he wanted to say to her

when opportunity permitted. For this reason, supper was served earlier than usual, so that the dishes could be cleared up and put away. She was just finishing this part of the work, when a rap came to the door, and upon being opened by Mrs. Wilson, Mac, as he was best known, greeted her with "Happy New Year, Mrs. Wilson," to which he added, "Having heard to-day that Robert has been paying you a visit and is returning to-morrow, I thought I would drop over and have a little chat." At this, he was invited and told to take off his coat, but it was soon apparent by the verbosity of his greeting, so unusual in his general reticent manner, that he had been celebrating the New Year with a little Scotch. He at once entered into the conversation with such fluency of words, as to give the impression that a gramophone, recording an encyclopaedia had been started on a perpetual motion basis! No matter what the subject, whether grain growing, raising Clydesdale horses, archaeology or Home Rule, he was equally at home, being a voluminous reader.

Eleven o'clock had come, when Marjorie, almost at fever heat with anger and disappointment, announced that she would get lunch before letting Mr. McKay go home, thinking that by so doing he would go right afterwards, but after it had been served he appeared to get going stronger than ever, till Marjorie, unable to stand the strain any longer, whispered to Jimmy asking him to say something that would make the old fool go home. A few minutes later, rising from his chair and looking towards the clock, Jimmy said, "Hully smoke, Robert, it is half-past twelve. If you are going to catch the train to-morrow, we shall have to be hitting the hay." Mac, then looking at his watch, as if to confirm the time, said, "I had no idea it was so late!" After putting on his coat, and again wishing everyone a Happy New Year, he passed out into the night. Marjorie, her face now purple with rage, said, "I never was so tired in all my life, listening to the harpings of that tightwad old blatherskite!"

Robert, seeing how troubled and upset she was in mind, and laying it to the fact that she was likely over-tired, owing to the continuous rounds of pleasure they had indulged in, bade her good-night, expressing the wish that she would have a good rest, and with Jimmy retired to his room. For a moment, almost beside herself in passion, she once more thought, "This is the last night, and the last opportunity for she didn't know how long." Why had she allowed Robert to go to his room without giving him some

suggestion he could have followed up without being conspicuous? The answer came in words of worldly wisdom she had once read, "When the mind is poisoned by anger, we act like damn fools." Then, going to her room and slamming the door, as if to give further expression to her feelings, she threw herself on the bed while her mind reflected on the bitter disappointments of life. Here she had pictured spending an evening that would lead into the paradise, at whose portals she felt she had come near but a week before. Now only persecution and the ashes of disappointment were her lot! It was so hard to understand! In this dilemma of doubt, Life's great material benefactor came to her aid, and soon her mind was at peace in sleep.

The next morning broke with a blustery cold Nor'wester that made them all urge Robert to remain over another day. He explained how important it was to get back in case Mr. Adams had decided to take his trip and so it was arranged then to make an early start as the roads would be heavy. Marjorie, who had decided to make the trip to town persisted in her idea against her mother's advice until Robert advised her that he thought it better for her to stay home. This she was most reluctant to do, feeling that all the powers of fate were against her. However, a few fervent embraces, the two of them alone in the living-room, at once transformed her feelings and she was happy again.

A few minutes later, the sleigh-bells outside gave notice that everything was in readiness for the trip, and with good-byes ringing with sincerity and affection, Robert, accompanied by William and Jimmy, was quickly carried away in the sleigh, behind a team of spirited horses, and was quickly lost to sight in the drifting snow.

Again on the train, speeding westward to home and duty, Robert could not help but think what true friends the Wilsons had proven as he had never felt more at home than with them. His thoughts then centred on Marjorie. What a fine type of girl she was in comparison with other girls he knew. Then he began to wonder if he was really in love with her and if he had done the right thing in kissing her as he had. Was that keeping his true troth to Mamie? If the positions were reversed what would he think? At first he felt he was able to justify the act, that it was only done in good friendship, and what difference should a kiss make just because it was a girl instead of some other respected friend? But, then remembering the thrill his feelings had been

subject to on both occasions, he felt that there was a difference, therefore, it must be wrong. If so, what was the honorable thing to do under the circumstances? It would be childish to write back and apologize, but on the other hand, he had been guilty involuntarily of playing false to both girls. In the midst of these deliberations and with a quickly developing sense of guilt, the brakeman announced "Badgerton", just as the whistle gave its warning note. In a few minutes later he was again back at the store, receiving a friendly welcome from Mr. Adams and the several customers present. A quick look around the store soon showed him that Mr. Adams' system had not made any improvement in the arrangement of the stock. His pent-up energies made him feel it would be a pleasure to get to work again. After supper, during which Mr. Adams advised Robert that they had definitely decided to take the trip and would leave as previously decided upon, they went down to the office to discuss details of the business. However, he was first handed several letters and packages which had arrived for him during his absence. These were lovely gifts from his parents and Mamie and Mrs. and Mr. Adams, and an unlooked-for gift from Mr. and Mrs. Cooke of Demoralburg, in the form of a gold watch and chain. Inside the case was engraved, "To Robert Benson, in appreciation of manly service, from Mr. and Mrs. J. Cooke. This was accompanied by a letter in which they told how much they felt indebted to him for what he had said, and the action he had taken to bring Mr. Cooke out of the selfish, despicable life he had lived for years. Mr. Cooke wrote that he realized the great blessing he had in his own wife, a fact he had almost ignored when steeped in sensuality and sin. As he finished this letter Robert could not help but remember that night in the Cafe La Francais, and ponder on how strange are the ways of life that can bring blessings out of such conditions.

With the answering of these letters and Mr. Adams' departure, the next few days proved exceptionally busy for the stock had to be put into shape, goods had to be ordered and records kept of the large sums of money received and paid out for the elevator company. Miss Raymore, however, whom he had met twice before at the store, proved a real help, being a willing worker, with such a cheerful disposition, that her personality always seemed to radiate sunshine. She had soon become a favorite with all the customers. Business continued to increase as the residents of a district some fifteen miles distant, who were unable to do trading in sum-

mer owing to the large river which had to be crossed, came to Badgerton during the months it was frozen. There was also a newly-established foreign settlement some distance away whose landowners now came to town in an Indian procession, willing to buy everything in sight, as long as, "Please Mister, I pay when I get my patent," would be accepted.

Skating enthusiasm continued to grow as several of the locals had now become quite adept in the art, and looking forward to further progress, Robert suggested one evening about a week later when a number had dropped into the store, as a matter of custom, that they should organize a hockey team and give Gopher Hill a game, as they had now been playing for the second year. The words had hardly been uttered before there was a general roar of agreement. "That's the idea, why has no one ever thought of it before?" someone asked, at which Slim Haskins replied in his droll way, "I guess the big reason was you did not know how to skate, and remember you pretty near have to know how before you play the game. You will find it's not shinny." The next day, several of the boys interviewed the rink committee, who were quite in accord and notices were at once posted calling for a meeting the next night, at which, as usual, everyone was present. No sooner had the meeting been brought to order than a motion was made that a hockey team to be known as the "Badgers" be organized. This was unanimously seconded and a management committee was then named. Robert was elected, and after thanking them all for the honor he called for a try-out the next evening.

Everyone that could skate was present on that occasion but after several races and different exercises of skating had been entered into, about half the number had dropped out, fully winded. Robert then announced that those who had come through would meet the following Tuesday, by which time the sticks would have arrived, so that they could have a tryout at stick-handling. Tuesday arrived and at the conclusion of a two hours' gruelling work-out, a team composed of the best skaters, all of good athletic build, was selected, with the understanding that if some of the others later were found to be better stick-handlers, some of the originals would be asked to step down so that these others might take their places. The remainder was made into two teams each appointing their own captain, so that from the start, a friendly rivalry existed for practice purposes. With several games a week being played between themselves, which gave all the members considerable

assurance in their ability to play, a challenge was sent to Gopher Hill which was at once accepted. Gopher Hill skaters also prided themselves on their ability and having practically two years' experience, looked forward to making it a walk-over. The time arranged being but ten days away, hockey at once, as with all sports in the West, became the one absorbing topic, for as is usually the case with most small towns, a feeling of pride or jealousy is so strongly created that, if it takes everyone's last ounce of energy, it must be spent to achieve victory. The historic clash would be held at the Badgerton rink.

Long before the scheduled hour on the great day, a continual procession of sleighs with ruddy-faced boys and girls, men and women, old and young, drove into Badgerton, making for the rink. By the time the game was due to start at two-thirty, standing room in the spacious side sheets, used for curling, was at a premium, the supporters for each team taking sides, as it were, to see who could out-do the other in the way of noise, being fully supplied with all kinds of noise-makers, from a shrill whistle to poplar pole, with which to hammer the wall. When the umpire made his appearance to make an inspection of the goals, consisting of two sticks frozen into the ice and no nets, continued applause broke loose. But, when the teams took the ice, the echoing noise gave the idea that bedlam was out on a holiday! The teams presented a picturesque appearance, some being arrayed in high-colored sweaters with short pants and heavy wool, home-made socks, some in long pants, one side rolled to the knee, some in overalls and smocks, some with heavy caps on and others with none. The ring from the umpire's bell quickly had everyone in position, final instructions were given, the puck was dropped and the big game was away with a deafening roar of applause as the Gopher Hill rover caught a nice pass from his mate's stick, and made a wild rush for the Badgers' goal. He met the sturdy defence of the Badgers with such a heavy heave on the shoulder that he bounded back hitting the ice on all fours. It was now the Badgers' turn. First the defence rushed the rubber forward, followed by Robert, who was also playing rover, but they were here met by a rush from the Gopher Hill defence, losing the puck again in a pile-up of four men. In the mix-up, however, the puck was shot to the wall where Robert again gathered it in, rushing forward to the goal, but just as he was in the act of shooting, he was tripped from behind and landed heavily by the wall, which opened up a big dispute. As the

unwritten law then was for the umpire to see no more than he had to, the act of tripping was ignored, while the Gopher Hill fans worked themselves into a fever heat of taunts and ridicule. The play-off was again made and the Gopher Hill forwards at once rushed the puck into a danger zone of the Badgers' goal, as if to stage a climax to the big act, but once more, the Badger defence rushed them, landing both players in the corner, the puck in the meantime, being gathered in by a Badgers' forward, who carried it back zig-zagging past the defence so that the goal-keeper, wishing to save the situation, dropped like a curtain across the ice, but while he was doing so, a neat little toss landed it behind him. This was all that was necessary for the Badger supporters to have their innings as their applause echoed and re-echoed on the frosty air, with such remarks as, "Oh, you Gopher Hillers, why don't you burrow for the Winter? Where did you learn the game, anyhow? Just stick around and we will show you how it is played." From the Gopher Hill side the shock appeared to unnerve them for they had expected a easy victory.

But, as the bell again called the play-off, the cheering was resumed, as rush upon rush was made by the Gopher forwards. Each rush was offset by the heavy checking of the Badgers defence, especially Carl Freiburg, whom they nicknamed Stone-wall Fritzzy, being of German descent. The game swayed back and forward, from one side to the other, till within three minutes of the end of the first period the fiery Gophers shot the puck in to even the score. The taunts of the Gopher Hill-ers waxed so strong that had it not been for the bell again calling the teams to the ice, it would possibly have been the scene of a general melee.

With a hardly-fought but scoreless second period, excitement waxed high by the time the first half of the third was over. Several rushes were made by both sides with the puck, but each time it went out of play. Then several attempts were made at combination play by both teams, but lacking technique, they were unsuccessful. When first defence for the Badgers got a good lift on the puck, sending it to the right-hand corner of the Gopher Hill goal, one of the Badger forwards, following it, carried it back behind the goal and shot it from the left side back to Robert, on the left, who caught it on the rebound from the wall. Immediately lifting it with lightning force he aimed straight for the goal, through which it passed, hitting the wall behind so hard as to make a deep denture. So quick had it been played that the goal-keeper had not noticed

it and was eagerly looking down the ice, to see what had become of it, when he saw the umpire's hand raised, ringing the bell, being unable to make himself heard in the pandemonium raised by the Badger fans. By the time the umpire reached centre ice for the play-off, time was called by the time-keeper's gong. This was all that was necessary for the Badger supporters to jump the fence, and in a moment's time they were gathering up the players on their shoulders before they could give a parting cheer to their defeated rivals. The Gopher Hill supporters hurried away with a look of chagrin and disappointment on their faces that told plainer than words the surprise it had been to see their team defeated by what they had termed, a bunch of Prairie upstarts. But the Badger fans lost no opportunity to rub it in good and hard, while the Gopher Hill supporters retaliated with, "Well, it's only lent, wait till we get you down on our ice, we will mop it up with you bunkums." The feeling between the two teams' supporters was so strong that before they had left for home, a return game was arranged to be played at the Gopher Hill rink the following week on the same day. However, three days later, a balmy chinook, from the west, melted the ice away so quickly that the rink was a puddle of water and the game was off.

CHAPTER 16

Life's greatest asset is found in peace and contentment, and the surest way to find it is to remember that there is no trial, affliction, storm or plague but has an end.—Nota Bene.

AFTER the big game, came several days of warm sunshine, bringing the crows usually regarded as the first harbingers of spring, when the bleak monotony of frost and snow must give way to the animated spirit of life, that so soon shows forth its beauty in the crocus again hidden in the mantle of green that quickly adorns the prairie. This subtle influence becomes transmitted to all western life and men and women at once become so engrossed in their daily duties, that pleasures are but a secondary consideration for they know that every hour of the long days of sunlight must be made to count against the short, growing season. It was also the time of the year for making new plans, many of which were first brought to mind in the round-the-stove talks, held during the long evenings at the local stores, where the habit of gathering for general discussion was a part of the routine of every day in those days when conditions were different.

In the discussions round the stove in Adams' store, Robert often joined, not only for social reasons but for the educational advantages they so often offered. One, who was generally looked upon as leader of these discussions, when he was present, was Sandy McNab, due to the practice he had of bringing out the many angles to every question. As he made it a point to come to town only Saturday night, to get his mail, the bigger questions were usually left for him to wrestle with. When the discussion was once started, he was always willing to stay till a decision had been reached or until the contentions of all the others had been met and disposed of. On one particular occasion he had just read a hand-bill of the American Colonization Company, stating that, commencing April fifteenth, they would again commence to bring in a special car of prospective settlers, every two weeks, during the following three months. They wanted anyone willing to sell their land to communicate with them direct. When he had finished

reading the bill, he at once remarked, "Some more bluff from those American Real Estate sharks." His remark was at once questioned by several others, who stated that they were doing good work in settling the country, and they should appreciate the fact that they had selected Badgerton. This immediately opened discussion. Sandy cited the fact that this was the same bunch who had purchased homesteads from several people the year before at six and seven dollars an acre, and in the fall, resold them at eighteen to twenty dollars an acre, and if the government was blind to this class of settler, who would spend only a few months of summer on their land, farming it in such a way that its fertility would soon become exhausted, content to carry back to the States the gains they had made, settlers here should show themselves awake to the fact. They could protect their own interests by holding on to their farms and encourage every young man they could to take up land and improve it with the idea of making it his home. This same Company, even now, was buying up large tracts in the better settled districts to hold for big profits, while the settlers improved theirs, thus increasing the value of the land of those who had no intention of improving it themselves. A few years later, he warned, when so many of these same farmers wanted a quarter for their sons, they would be obliged to pay two prices for it, so that instead of keeping the boys at home, they would have to go to distant parts, where cheaper land was to be obtained, just because their fathers had let these Shylocks come in and rob them of their birthrights. When Sandy finished his general outline of what had been going on in front of their eyes, they could not help but realize the fools' paradise they were living in, while the colonization company was reaping in big profits under the guise of a charitable enterprise. They at once became imbued with the truth that immediate action was necessary, and the plan pointed out by Sandy was a very feasible one. They should purchase whatever land it was possible for them to handle during the next five years even if they had to borrow the money to make the payment, as it was only a matter of time till it would be worth considerably more money. The details of the discussion were soon heard over the district, and before two weeks had passed, several quarters and half sections had been purchased. Robert, who had been an interested listener, at once became convinced of the soundness of Sandy's argument, but felt that, with only three hundred dollars he could not take advantage of buying a quarter. But,

the more he thought the matter over, the more interested he became, so that before Sandy had left the store, he again asked his advice. Sandy told him that he considered it a gilt-edged proposition, and he would like to see him get a half section, and if he had not sufficient money he would loan him the balance on straight note at bank interest. Furthermore, he knew of a good half-section within a mile from town with eighty acres broken on it, which he thought he could buy for him. Robert at once filled with the idea of becoming a landowner thanked him for his advice and offer and told him he would be very pleased to have him make any deal he saw fit, as personally he knew nothing about land.

This formed the beginning of a friendship that continued to grow as the years went by, Sandy ever acting the part of dutiful father, while Robert leaned on Sandy's foresight and good judgment with the implicit trust that honor and confidence bring. Two weeks later, Sandy, through his business ability, was able to hand to Robert the Agreement of Sale for a half-section at two dollars an acre, less than it had formerly been held at, with a payment of five hundred dollars down, and half payment the following year. The half-section cornered by Sandy was all fine arable land and would have, no doubt, been sold long before but for the fact that very few had known who the owner was. When the papers were turned over to Robert, he was so proud that he did not know how to thank Sandy for such valued assistance. As he tried to do so, Sandy immediately cut in with "Give me a dollar's worth of brier, I have been out of tobacco ever since morning." His abrupt manner showed that he was not looking for praise or thanks and so Robert didn't know how to show his appreciation.

The next few weeks were busy days for Badgerton, with new settlers arriving, obliged to buy many lines of merchandise which kept all business activities at high tension. During this time Mr. and Mrs. Adams returned, after a very pleasant trip, and finding that the business had been so well conducted were very complimentary in their remarks to Robert. A few days later he was again to have good fortune smile upon him, when a settler with an outfit of horses and implements came to inquire if he knew of any land he could get till he could have some buildings put up on his homestead some distance away. Robert at once told him of the land he had recently purchased and an arrangement was soon entered into, whereby he was to work the land and do some breaking on a third of the crop basis. The sod building was suitable

for the horses and it only required the building of a small shack to live in. This was done at once.

With the many settlers that had come into the district during the last year, it was found necessary to open up several new schools. When the first of these were erected several of the settlers became interested in the idea of having church service and the pastor in Badgerton was asked to arrange it for them. The pastor at once referred the matter to the church board, who after giving it careful consideration, were desirous of assisting the outside points if the matter could be so arranged. This would necessitate allowing the pastor to take such services at two appointments every other Sunday in the afternoons, at the time he had formerly conducted the Sabbath School. To do this would require securing the services of someone to act as Superintendent and Bible Class teacher. The pastor, recognizing the interest Robert had shown in connection with all church work, at once approached him, but he declined, saying that he was not fitted for the work, and that his time was already so taken up Sundays with the choir and teaching of the boys' class. The pastor, feeling it was a matter of great importance that these two outside appointments should receive spiritual guidance and recognizing the fact that in another year they would be the source of considerable revenue for his church, if they did not turn to some other church, through his church's neglect, insisted to Robert that it was a Christian's duty to fulfill the Bible injunction to act as our brothers' keeper. From this viewpoint Robert felt it was incumbent upon him to take over the work. This now made Sunday such a very busy day for him that he was often obliged to refuse an invitation to spend the day with some friend in the country so that the work would be properly conducted.

Sunday had also been the day he used to do his correspondence, having faithfully adhered to writing weekly to Mamie and his parents. Since his trip to the Wilson's, he had also felt obliged to answer Marjorie's weekly letter or letters, but he endeavored each time to extend the time between receiving and replying to her letters, hoping thereby that the infatuation that had grown out of his visit would wear off. But, as each letter from Marjorie continued to increase in its terms of endearment, he decided that he would have to write and face the issue squarely, but being reluctant to do this he failed to write for a month, although he received several, now reproachful letters from her in that period. At first

he felt it was impossible to write a letter to a friend he respected as much as Marjorie without hurting her feelings, especially when to make the situation clear, it meant throwing aside her love. But he was doing a greater wrong in allowing her to be deceived as to his intentions, for apparently she had never given any thought to the friend he had told her he had back home in the East. Finally, seeing no other honorable way out, he wrote in the most friendly manner stating how much he had appreciated her letters and telling of the pleasure it gave him to look back on the enjoyable holiday he had spent with her and the family. However, he felt he was abusing the sacred ties of friendship by continuing to correspond with her under the circumstances, as there could be no other result for her but disappointment. He was already bound by ties of friendship which had ripened into love with a girl in the East, he continued. If he had, in a moment of temptation, acted in a manner denying this definite tie, it had been in a moment of weakness, and he most humbly apologized. It was still his sincerest desire to consider her one of his best friends, he concluded.

Could Robert have been present when his letter was received, he might have realized something of the pangs of sorrow the heart is subject to in the knowledge of unrequited love, which at a later date he was to experience himself. When Marjorie had penned the lines which brought this reply from him, she had done so with the one idea that it would awaken him to give her letters more immediate consideration, never realizing that such a confession would be the answer. This was more than she could bear. She just couldn't think of giving him up. No one had any better claim; she loved him more than life itself; without him the world seemed like a barren desert, for since the first day they had met, life had been so different. Each morning, when she had awakened, it had been with a song on her lips for the pleasure of being alive to enjoy life's greatest thrill, and now in a moment of time, those few words like a dagger thrust, had ended all; she could not help but ask herself, "Life, what is thy mission when thou art so cruel?" Then, as if it were possible for tears to drown her sorrow, the flood gates of her soul were opened as she sobbed till her eyes were bloodshot. It was in this condition that her mother found her a short time later. Seeing the letter clasped tightly in her hands, she was quick to discern the cause and immediately took her in her arms, realizing as she did that her baby girl had now grown up to womanhood and was conscious of the passions and

inconsistencies that make up life's perplexities. Inquiring the cause of her trouble, she was handed the letter, Marjorie again falling back in her arms in another paroxysm of grief. After reading it through hurriedly, she tried to convey the thoughts that form life's greatest heritage in times of adversity and affliction—Faith and Hope—pointing out that one of our great weaknesses is selfishness, which we must continue to guard and fight against both in our material and spiritual life. She gradually worked round to referring to the position of the other girl, and how she, Marjorie, would have felt had their positions been reversed.

She then commended Robert for the gentle but plain manner in which he had put the matter and for asking her to remain his friend. "You should at once acknowledge the letter with the same candor and frankness in which he has written you, which is sure to bring peace of mind." Before the evening had passed, the letter was written, although each word seemed to exact her heart's blood, as she endeavored to express her thoughts in such a way as would not offend, but at the same time, veiling the love she felt pulsating through her being. When the letter had been sealed, the last look taken at the address, there came a feeling of peace that a few hours before she had felt she could never know again. Such is the psychology of mental thought.

CHAPTER 17

For the faith that will steady your soul like an anchor, seek it not in the myths of man-made books, but in the world of nature, where its beauty, sublimity and majesty, reflect the glory of God.—Nota Bene.

THE busy spring season passed so quickly that the long summer days seemed to come almost unexpectedly, bringing with them a short period before harvest for the usual picnics and sport days, of which Westerners take full advantage before the long grind of hard work to follow. Robert, who in his daily companionship with Miss Raymore had come to look upon her much as a sister, soon fell into the habit of taking her to such gatherings. To those who did not know the innocent basis of their friendship, this association led to the conclusion that they were engaged. Thus many of the boys had given up the idea of trying to make any dates with her. When it came to the last picnic, held by the Sunday School just before harvest, the story was different.

The night before that picnic Fred Thomas, who had spent many evenings around the store in a more or less listless way, and was considered by a number of the girls to be bashful, stepped around the end of the counter after purchasing a plug of tobacco from Robert, and in a whisper asked if Robert intended taking in the picnic next day. When Robert replied that he did not know whether Mr. Adams intended closing the store or not, Fred said he thought Robert had better stay home for once and give another fellow a chance. He had such a sheepish look in his eyes that had it not been for his obvious sincerity, Robert would have laughed. Taking him seriously he said, "Why, Fred, what is the big idea?" "I was going to ask Miss Raymore to go with me," said Fred, "as I have a new buggy." Robert now reached towards him and tapping him on the shoulder said firmly, "A real idea, Fred. Don't for a minute let me stand in your way." It was two hours later, however, before Fred worked up sufficient courage to "make the break," which he did by getting Miss Raymore to show him a shirt. From there he gradually worked around to telling her he

was going to the picnic and would like to have the pleasure of taking her along in his new buggy. No doubt she gave the matter little thought when she said she would consider it a great honor to be the first to initiate the new buggy, but the charm worked wonderfully well, as six months later, the store lost a good clerk and Fred was made happy in securing a good wife whose maiden name was Raymore!

Next day Badgerton was practically a closed town for every one took in the last picnic of the season held at a sheltered cove on the river bank some five miles distant. This meant a pleasant drive over the winding trails through fields of green waving grain, which here and there had commenced to show traces of gold, indicating the ripening season was close at hand. The pleased expressions on the faces of all that were in attendance was evidence of the joyful anticipation they had of a bountiful crop—the western barometer reading which would delight big business in the East as well as the West! The week that followed continued with ideal ripening weather and one nice shower, so that by the beginning of the next, like a miracle working, the great stretches of deep green were, as it seemed, transformed almost before one's eyes into gold over the entire countryside. The golden landscape with its acres of wheat and oats, waving in the gentle breeze, from which the poignant aroma of harvest began to fill the air was a comfort as well as a delight while the musical hum of binders in every direction, chugging away spitting sheaves as fast as the knoter would work, provided the background music for drama of life never to be forgotten!

Robert could not help but review the change that had taken place in such a short space of time, since the picnic. His mind went to the power behind all these temporal blessings, especially when he viewed his own field that had been purchased through Sandy's guidance and advice, and upon which now stood such an excellent crop of wheat. In the true spirit of prayer, he offered up thanks to God. He reminded himself of the fact that six months had almost passed and he had never yet been considerate enough to go over and express his thanks to Sandy for the valued kindness he had rendered him. No longer would he feel guilty he decided, so off he went, covering the mile of prairie that separated him from the neat little white cottage where Sandy resided, in quick time.

He soon stood before the doorway where Sandy was reading

from numerous papers and magazines scattered about, and in a few brief minutes they were chatting away about the crops and the ideal weather prevailing.

He groped for words with which to express to Sandy his appreciation for the services he had rendered him, but the nervous way in which his words came showed his embarrassment and Sandy, with the look that always showed his powers of deductive reasoning, careful thought and consideration, said, "It is but human nature to be pleased when our humble services are appreciated, and your actions, if not your words, have always given me that feeling. Personally I rely more on actions to express truth than I do on words, and I am only too pleased to have been of some service to you, for service is life's great secret to happiness. I also agree with you it is the easiest thing in the world to be a fairweather Christian." Robert somewhat perplexed at the meaning to be attached to these words, said, "I am afraid I do not understand you." Sandy replied, "I have reference to that great class in which you have just included yourself, whose members, when material success and prosperity are showered upon them are quite willing to give credit to God, but when trials, afflictions overtake them, they give way to doubt and fear. God is the one and only being with All Power and Majesty, the Alpha and Omega of life and death, and all that is in the universe. Then if we accept this truth, and I do, God is responsible for trials and adversities to the same extent He is for our blessings and prosperity. Christianity maintains God is a God of love, a statement with which I am in full accord. Not because the Bible is the proof to be given, but because it is daily revealed to me in nature, the one place we can worship God in spirit and in truth. Going back to the Bible, the question may be naturally asked "Does it not contain many valuable lessons of life?" and we answer, "Yes," because it is one of our oldest books and contains many records of experiences and experience is the greatest educator there is in life, and to go further, it no doubt contains what we may consider inspired thought, which life proves are the bulwarks in civilization. But the standard of these cannot be proven to be any better than those that have been given to us by philosophers, scientists, and inventors in every age. It is true that many worthwhile are found in the Psalms, Book of Job, Solomon and others. The ten commandments hold the principles of law that mankind has found worthy of approval. Therefore, let the Bible

be considered in the same light in our religious life as our alphabet is in our educational life. The ideals that stand the acid test of time and experience may they be given careful consideration and meditation, but to that portion which is but folklore, history, false translation, spurious insertions by crafty priests, that have both scientifically and historically have proven to be false, let them be placed in the category they belong, so that the seeker after truth may understand the Bible as the book it is, and not look upon it with that revered air of superstition that forbids a candid doubt and that makes him a follower of a blind leader like a docile sheep being led to the shambles."

Robert, who had commenced to show the agitation he felt under the strain of this oratorical effusion, which to his way of thinking was ridiculous and absurd, questioned, "From what you have said, I am almost convinced you do not believe the Bible. If so, then what do you believe?"

"If by belief you infer I do not accept the Bible as the word of God, you are quite right. If as an old Jewish record of stories that have been retold from other nations, to which the Jews have added their own ideals of literature, combining with it certain events in their history, yes. Why should it be necessary for a great God, the Father of all, whose power we are unable to comprehend, be obliged to inspire a book to be written by human beings in such a way that no human being can understand it? It is so full of perplexities that the world has been turned into a pandemonium of sectarianism, with every sect claiming that they only hold the true key when God, with all power at His command, could daily write a divine message across the skies? If the Bible were true, according to Christianity, practically ninety per cent. of mankind would be cast into what they picture as a Hell of torments, there to writhe in agony for eternity. To give any credence to such a doctrine is placing more on credulity of ignorance than intelligence, and more than good judgment will ever accept. To-day, in the words of science, we ask, "Give us the evidence and if it is true, we will believe, but as far as believing somebody we know not whom, we cannot." That day is buried with the mythology of the past."

At these words, Robert stepped towards the door, saying as he did so, "Your remarks are entirely outside my conception of reason, therefore, I must assure you I am no further interested in such a discussion, and bid you good-afternoon." But, before

he opened the door, Sandy turning towards him with as near a look of sympathy on his face as his shaggy beard would permit, replied, "Robert, the last thing in the world I would want to do is to hurt your feelings or destroy the faith you now hold, or deter you from your association in your church affiliations. If I were assured that you had ever given any consideration as to what you really believe more than to accept what you have been told was the creed of the church you belong to, said to be founded on the Bible, I would not have spoken as I have. I can honestly sympathize with you on the ideals you have been brought up to cherish and believe by revered parents, who gave the best they knew, for I have passed through the same experience, going even further than many others by completing a full course for the ministry in the Presbyterian church in the old land. It was practically only due to a turn of fate that I am not fulfilling that mission in life to-day, in place of holding down a homestead here, far from my native land, to be known only by my friends here as "queer" because I am a free thinker, skeptical and agnostic in my belief. But, any points I have raised are those which, sooner or later, you will meet with in life when adversities begin to cross your pathway. I will say, in regard to believing in God and praying to Him, that the one who in sincerity and love communes with God in prayer, cannot help but be kinder and broader-minded to his fellowmen, for in this attitude all the tenderest and noblest passions are brought into reverence."

The expression that now came to Robert's eyes showed that mutual cords of sympathy had been struck. His mind went back to Demoralburg, where he remembered many times his prayers had not been answered apparently, as in return for his promise to lead a Christian life, he had been obliged to make his living in a red-light dive. He turned again to Sandy, "Before you proceed further" he said, "I apologize for being so hasty in my conclusions, for you make me realize I am but a babe in religious experience; but from your statements I am specially interested to know what religious view you hold seeing you do not accept the Bible as bringing to man the plan of God."

"The question you have asked me is the greatest I expect to answer this side of the vale," replied Sandy, "and the answer I am about to give you is one borne within the soul from thought and experience. I believe in an all-wise Heavenly Father who from the beginning has known the end and has made everything in

harmony with a great plan based beyond what mine or any other earthly mind can conceive, for I remember I am finite and cannot possibly understand the Infinite. I believe in a spirit of evil, otherwise I could not account for feelings that come from thoughts borne within my mind, that are not in accordance with the love I owe my fellowmen. The faith I hold, if you wish to consider it as such, is that this world, as we see and know it, is passing through an age of experience, whereby mankind will learn the blessings of that experience through reason with which it has been endowed, and the few years of life are but as a grain of sand in eternity, so that whether it is lived as the noble part of prince or the humble part of slave is immaterial. But the light of reason seems to assure us that God in His own due time will bring forth a plan, when all creeds and so called heathen, will know the Truth; that could be referred to as Millenium. For to-day, we are only victims of circumstances over which we have no control; as to where we are born or what kind of religious instruction, we will be taught, of the 256 creeds or more in the world. The part we play in this life is a secret in the hands of the power we accredit to God." Robert impatiently interrupted saying, "I certainly appreciate very much the candor with which you have expressed your views, but to me they seem so radical that it is impossible to even grasp their meaning, so I hope you don't mind me asking some questions about them?"

"Any further light I can throw on what I have said will only afford me a pleasure, as long as the subject is agreeable to you."

"I note what you said about faith. Is faith not the first step to any action?"

"That is one of the ideas the church has taught to bring us into the realm of mystery. If I were to tell you I had a thousand dollars buried on yonder bluff the first thought that would come to your mind, would be the reasonableness of the assertion. If your confidence was such from what you knew of me, I could possibly create faith in my assertion, but if my character were questionable, you would, no doubt, and rightly so, give little credence to the story. Again, if I sold you ten bushels of barley and you sowed it, it would require a lot of faith on your part to believe you could reap wheat on this acreage."

"That may be true, but I cannot see where the simile has anything to do with faith, as I could not expect wheat if I sowed barley."

"That is just my point, We are told the Bible teaches that no

matter how bad the criminal, if he subscribes to this idea called faith, his salvation is assured; While on the other hand, the man he may have murdered in cold blood; living a conscientious life, but possibly never having a contact to receive this so called salvation, is eternally lost. No, this kind of religious logic will not do; rest assured, if it was God's intention to convert the world, in this age the same perfect plan that is shown throughout the universe would be in force. Man alone appears to be the crowning achievement for all the glory and beauty that is to be found in the world, so that to say he will be destroyed for hereditary sin he cannot understand, because the one called the Devil usurped the power that is supposed to belong to God, only goes to prove the illogical reasoning in the minds of those who wrote the Bible."

"I still cannot be convinced from the points you have taken, but that we are indebted to the Bible for our advanced civilization owing to the fact that the Christian missionaries went westward instead of eastward."

"That only goes to show you are not versed in the historical records, that prove Babylonia, Egypt, and Greece and a people known as the Moors, who built up a splendid civilization in Spain had a much higher standard before anything was known of Christianity. This standard was broken down, as priestcraft gained power under the despotic kings, who believed in the Divine Right, as taken from the Bible, and whose power held sway over Europe for several hundred years in what we have already referred to as the Dark Ages up to near the times of the French Revolution. Then the yoke of tyranny was broken by zealous free thinkers, who proved to be the advance guard of the freedom of thought we have to-day."

"Then, I am to understand from what you have said that Christianity has had no influence for good in the world?" asked Robert.

"Now I don't want you to get any such idea from what I have said, for there are many professing Christians whose lives have ever stood out like a beacon in the world, because they took out the gold from the dross contained in the Bible and live exemplary lives. A study of ethnology which has many angles for thought, gives a very convincing idea that when God saw fit to make a man and place him in the world, and endow him with the faculty of reason, he intended him to use it, so in His all-wise purpose he allowed a spirit of evil to enter, that man might be tried with

afflictions and adversities in order to gain wisdom. For we know as a truth that people who live in an environment of beautiful and perpetual sunshine do not know how to appreciate it as do those from whom its rays are hidden by clouds and fog.

Robert, who'd been sitting wrapped in thought after Sandy's last remark, noted it was passed suppertime as Sandy at once proceeded to start the fire having placed the wood and in the act of striking the match said, "Well, we shall have supper now." This brought Robert out of his reverie, who replied in a jovial way, "I was beginning to think that way myself, but it required the loosening tension of the spell of thought. There are yet several questions on which I would like to ask your opinion, but as you've asked me to supper I shall set the table first."

It was some two hours later, before supper was finished and the usual chores completed. Sandy, his pipe waving blue clouds of smoke through the open doorway, re-opened the discussion with the remark, "I have no idea of the questionnaire you have in mind, but, there are possibly a few points I can touch on by giving you a brief outline as to why I am convinced the Bible is not the word of God. Proof I will take from the Bible itself, so that it cannot be said that this is a man-made contention by applying our own judgment and common sense to the extent that some of the acts recorded there could possibly be inspired by an all-wise and loving God. The Bible is not inspired because it is not true. This is proven by the falsity of its science and some of its foolish and impracticable philosophy. It contains, also, exaggerated and disconnected historical and chronological records. Proof of this is given by comparing Genesis Chapter 36 verse 31, with 1st Chronicles Chapter 1 verse 43. giving this verse verbatim, which in accordance with its accepted chronology, was written eight hundred and sixty years after Moses' death. That is sufficient proof to show that the Bible is not the antiquated book we have been led to believe it is, and that Moses was not the writer, and the book of Genesis was written or parts added to, after Chronicles had been written. Further proof of which can be had by turning to the First Chronicles Chapter 3 verse 15, which, speaking of the descendants of David, mentions Zedekiah. If the Old Testament is not sufficient proof, the same evidence can be found in the New, for, in giving the genealogy of Jesus, Matthew gives the number from David as twenty-eight, while in Luke the number is forty-

three. Therefore, must God be blamed for this discrepancy by those who believe it to be His inspired Holy word?"

The Bible, I believe is not the word of God because it teaches and upholds religious persecution, slavery, murder, lying, cannibalism, cheating, stealing, polygamy, war, tyranny, and other crimes such as found in Deuteronomy ch. 21 verses 18-21. It contains imperfect moral and civil laws which almost any civilized country would not have on their statutes. Let me quote you an example from Romans ch. 13 vs. 1 and 2, as an illustration where the despotism claimed as the Divine Right of Kings gets its authority: "Let every soul be subject unto the higher power, for there is no power but of God, and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation." Imagine where our civilization would be today if the ignorant tyranny of Bible ethics had been able to hold power? You, no doubt, know that the fundamental principles of our moral law are based on the Ten Commandments: therefore it is only reasonable that the truths they are supposed to teach should be upheld throughout the Bible. But we find they are not. In the first place there are two records given supposedly written by Moses, "Exodus ch. 20 vs. 1-17, Deuteronomy ch. 5 vs. 7-21. In the Exodus account the fourth commandment gives the reason for observance of the Sabbath day as follows: "God made the Heavens and the earth in six days and rested on the seventh." In Deuteronomy it is stated as being the day on which the children of Israel came out of Egypt. Which then is the authentic one written by God on the two tables of stone; or is it not more likely that Moses' Egoism was playing its part, as in the verses that follow he gives description of the tumult in the mountain. The kind of information that keeps ignorance in subjugation. As if a God of all power had to put on an exhibition of this kind to impress those he had made."

"In the second commandment, God is said to be a jealous God, visiting the iniquities of the fathers, unto the third and fourth generation. Let us consider this statement. A Great God of all power, who made us and knows the weakness and frailties of our nature; jealous, because we worship false Gods in this life; due to environment of superstition, we may be placed in over which we have no control. We are told that Christianity is the way out and if we have faith as a seed of mustard, we can remove mountains. But we have yet to see in fact or simile, such removal; for as we wit-

ness the trials, and perplexities, of those who try to follow its zig-zag pathway, the end too often is the slough of despond."

"I will now return to citation of texts for the accusations I have made against the Bible as being the word of God. In the 28th ch. of Deuteronomy, vs. 53-56, we read these infamous words, "And thou shalt eat the fruits of thine own body, the flesh of thy sons and thy daughters which the Lord thy God hath given thee, etc." Could such idea of cannibalism be possible from God who made all? Exodus, ch. 32 v. 27, will be found this revolting order to go out and murder, "Thus saith the Lord, God of Israel, put every man his sword by his side and go in and out from gate to gate throughout the camp and slay every man, his brother and every man his companion, and every man his neighbor. And the children of Levi did according to the word of Moses and there fell of the people that day about three thousand men." The question may be raised that there must have been a grievous reason for such blood-thirsty action. But the cause we are told was that in their ignorant superstition they had worshipped the Golden Calf. If Moses were here to-day, with this same idealism and saw the worshippers of the almighty dollar, our rivers would be running in blood."

"In the 3rd Chapter v. 21, 22 of Exodus, the command to steal is put into the mouth of God by the writer whoever it might be, "And I will give this people favor in the sight of the Egyptians and it shall come to pass that when ye go ye shall not go empty but every woman shall borrow of her neighbor and of her that sojourneth in the house, jewels of silver and jewels of gold and raiment and ye shall put them on your sons and your daughters, and ye shall spoil the Egyptians." The 12th chapter tells of the success that was attained from this wanton manner of pilfering, for to steal under the pretext of borrowing shows the cowardly craftiness and deceptive morals of the leaders. To place such trickery in the name of God is utmost blasphemy. The Bible teaches that lying is a virtue. These words are found in Jeremiah, Chapter 20 verse 7, "Oh, Lord, thou hast deceived me and I was deceived. Thou wast stronger than I and has prevailed. I am in derision daily, and everyone mocketh me." In Chapter 4 verse 10, the prophet repeats the charge of deception, "Then said I, 'Ah, Lord God, surely thou has greatly deceived this people and Jerusalem saying, 'Ye shall have peace whereas the sword reacheth into the soul.'" Ezekiel, Chapter 14 verse 9, "And if the prophet

be deceived when he hath spoken a thing, I, the Lord, have deceived that prophet." This verse is but proof of the ego of man's assumption, because his mind has led him to believe he has been called by God to do a certain work and if it does not turn out to his expectation, he tries to place the blame back to God. Again in the Second Corinthians, Chapter 12, verse 16, Paul writes, "Being crafty I caught you with guile, (deception and untruth)." Therefore, a book that upholds lying is not the word of God, but proof that man's idealism is not infallible."

"Now, for real fiendishness, note this command in 1st Samuel Chapter 15 verse 3, "Now go and smite Amalek and utterly destroy all they have and spare them not, but slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox, sheep, camel and ass." For such words as these to come down to this day of enlightened 20th century and to be looked upon as the Divine word of God, is hardly creditable to the advancement we have shown in so many other ways."

"Searching through the many curses of the saintly Jeremiah you will find in Chapter 48 verse 10, these words that again bear no earmarks of inspiration, "Cursed be he that doeth the work of the Lord deceitfully and cursed be he that keepeth back his sword from blood." In the raving of Ezekiel who is accorded the honor of eating Old Testament manuscript at the command of God, Chapter 9 verse 6, you will find this inhuman command, "Slay utterly both old and young, both maids and little children, and women, etc." The only comment that could honestly be made here is the hope that the manuscript he ate would not be digestible. In the 31st Chapter of Numbers we are again told that it was at the command of God that the Jewish army made war on the Midianites. The Jews after slaying the men who defended their homes, sacked and burned their cities. To cap the ignominious atrocities, this infamous order was given by their leader Moses, as being inspired of God, verses 17 and 18, "Now therefore, kill every male among the little ones and kill every woman that hath known man by lying with him. But all the women children that hath not known man by lying with him, keep for yourselves." I ask in all the records of history, where will you find a more revolting, revengeful, lustful outrage having been perpetrated? It would put to shame the most sordid crime that any detective novel ever published in this age. The whole of this is laid to the hand of God as given in the first verse, "And the Lord spake unto Moses saying—" In the 35th verse we are told that the number of maidens

who had seen their mothers murdered by these heartless assassins was thirty-two thousand, and they were to meet a worse fate by being carried away, servile slaves, to be made the victims of loathsome lust."

"So I place the question before you in all sincerity, Why do we continue to subscribe our faith and our substance to such a preposterous imposition? You have only to use your eyes and understanding to reach a conclusion. It is because of our blind reverence for a book that practically no more than five percent have ever investigated, plus an inherent desire to walk under the standard of popular opinion rather than be branded as heretic and be snubbed by and unpopular with our friends."

Robert, who had sat spellbound during the recital of this scathing criticism finally expressed his thoughts on Sandy's statements by saying, "You have to-day given me more insight into and constructive criticism of the Bible than I would have thought possible, for it seems to me I have read so many pages in it that told of God's love and mercy that I wouldn't have thought it possible for such contrasts as you have brought out, to be in the same book. But behind all that you have said, what would we have done for a book of guidance for our moral and spiritual welfare, if we had not been given the Bible?"

"No simpler way could this question be answered than to point to Mohammedism, Confucianism and Zoroaster, whose followers all believe that they only hold the inspired word, and look upon Christianity as something that could contaminate them. The Mohammedans believe that the Koran was brought to them by an angel from Heaven, while practically the only visible difference between their teaching and that of Christianity is that its priests have been able to hold greater control over its people, while with Christianity, sectarianism has made a divided house, out of which have been born great numbers of free thinkers who are now tearing aside the obscuring veil with which all religion so strongly desire to cloak themselves, and reveal the Bible as the book it really is. By so doing, science and modernism are making their bow to the world as the great powers by which superstition is being dethroned. Thus a greater religion is being built on the rock of Truth revealing the Majesty of a great God through the facts revealed by nature."

"The greatest argument of all that can be shown against the so-called teachings of Christianity is the fact that Jesus Christ

came into the world to save it, according to its creed. This can be proven from its own records to be almost absolute failure. What business in the world would ever be considered a success that could not make a showing of at least obtaining a fair share of the business it was entitled to, let alone being in the minor ranks. Therefore, it is only reasonable to believe that this is not the plan of God, because when we compare it with the perfection that governs the universe, there is a feeling of revolt against such theories and ethics that seems to say, 'This will not do', for such a plan does not prove consistent enough to make me feel confident it is of God. Therefore, if the reasoning mind is to serve us, this age is an age of experience. So let us turn the searchlight of reason on some of the most perplexing theories. In the first place, we are brought as innocent children into this life, without any consideration whether we desire it or not, some in beautiful homes of luxury, others in dirty hovels of poverty and want, in which life may be either short or long, pleasant or full of trials and adversities.

"We look into the immensity of space and behold the lights of what may be thousands of other worlds possibly more beautiful than our own earth, which we know is a globe revolving in space, lighted and heated by the sun, and at night by the reflected rays of the moon and the stars, which through its systematic concourse, brings us the different seasons with perfect regularity. So, that we truly confirm the idea of the wonderful first cause of all this we know as God. When we look over this earth and see the wonderful forms of life, the intelligence of the animal kingdom, the fowls of the air with their gorgeous plumage and marvelous instinct for the propagation of their species, the denizens of the deep sea with their amazing equipment designed to meet the conditions of their surroundings, and last but not least, man, the greatest being of creation, who has been given power to not only transform the wilderness into earthly paradise but through intelligence and control to act as master over all life. Why did God make such a place for man and then permit evil to bring upon him sickness, trials, tribulations and death, thus defeating His own plans, if the idea of our religion as advanced by propagandists of various creeds were true? This, in the light of ordinary common-sense, is impossible to accept, even if it has been handed down to us by revered parents, priests and ministers, honest and faithful

in their convictions. The truth has no more been proven than it was in their day. That such a God would bring man into this world only to see him suffer and be lost throughout Eternity, a victim of circumstances over which He has no control is nothing, more or less, than absurd dogma born in ignorance. This life does not contain a fair trial for either Heaven or Hell, as taught in the creeds, if there were such places. We may take the case of a virtuous girl who has been raised in a Christian home and taught by a loving mother to believe in His protecting care and guidance, but who possibly on her first trip from home meets with some contemptible libertine, who seduces her with his subtle and lying words, because she is innocent to the ways of the world. She holds the belief she has been taught that God will protect her, until she awakens to the truth, only to find she has been deceived and lost to her home and respect of the world. What doctrine answers these questions to the satisfaction of a critical and investigating mind? Christianity has failed in all its branches. Then, where are we to look for the answer? To me that answer is found in the grand conclusion that this age is in accordance with the plan of God, an age of experience."

Robert, who had been following each assertion with a critical and questioning look, quickly remarked, "You have almost hypnotized me with that word, "Experience." Before you proceed further, I would like to know the meaning of its application as you imply it."

"I have used the word to imply that, in this age, when Christianity is teaching that this is a period, given by God for man to gain his salvation through the merits of Jesus Christ, such is not the case, and that in the true plan of God, it is more reasonable to believe it is an age in which we will learn wisdom from experience. For I think any logical reasoning cannot help but surmise that God did not make this world in vain, but had a plan for the future as perfect as that which controls the universe."

Robert who was still lost in thought in trying to conjecture out the ideas that were being conveyed, now asked, "But if all of what you said was true, where is it going to get us? Is there still a Heaven behind its portals?"

"You know when you finished your public or high school course, you had received an education that gave you a certain

confidence and preparedness to take your place in the world. When you have finished your life here, it should have been lived in the same manner, so at the end there will be confidence and peace. What remains beyond that is a mystery in the hands of God, but from what He has shown us in this life there is a beacon of hope that all shall be well. I have now given you the complete outline of the true ideals I hold, which is what I think everyone can have from God, so that no one need be confused with any written words in the form of a book on which the stamp of man's ideals are made in such a way as to prove its authenticity has not been inspired."

At the conclusion of these words, Robert said with great emotion, "I cannot express in words my thanks for the able and scholarly manner in which you have placed before me a new viewpoint on religion. Although many of the points you have raised are far from what I have always believed to be the truth, still you have given me considerable food for thought." Then reaching for his hat, he passed from the door into the ideal summer night.

CHAPTER 18

A day's work may be what you are paid for, and your chances of promotion in what you are not paid for, but experience proves therein lies your big opportunity.—Nota Bene.

ALTHOUGH Robert was thankful to Sandy for his business help and advice, especially when he was given a cheque for his share of Seven Hundred and Sixty Dollars, paid for the golden grain harvested from his own land and realized how little effort he had put forward to obtain it, he still had a feeling of hostility toward him for the opposition he took towards the Bible. Finally at one of the week-night meetings at the church, when the Bible was the subject under discussion by the pastor, Robert had the opportunity of asking some of the questions that Sandy raised. The parson, somewhat confused and without answering the questions, replied, "Those questions, Robert, are the kind that Sandy McNab would ask and he is the type of man who has become an infidel because his standard of Christianity is not always found in the churches." Robert, from training, teaching and habit, was about to accept the opinion given by the pastor, but on comparing it with the reasoning Sandy had used, again questioned "Don't you consider that if Christianity is all we feel and know it to be, every knock will only prove a boost?" The pastor then looked at Robert in a way that suggested doubt as to the sincerity of the words he had spoken and replied, "Yes, and has the history of the world not proven it so? Still you must remember that Christianity is founded on faith."

The pastor's wife, who had taken notice of the interest in which the others present were following the discussion, now showed by her actions in putting on her coat that she considered it time to adjourn, and the evening being well-advanced, the meeting was then closed. After Robert had left the church, however, he wondered why it was that anyone who spoke against religion was always looked upon with suspicion and doubt, no matter how sincere and honest they might be in their search for truth? The

foundation of the Christian religion is supposed to be built on love and charity, he mused.

During the weeks that followed little of special interest broke the daily round of long work-filled hours. Again the shortening days of November gave notice that old man Winter was making a bid for a speedy return, as the cold crisp morning air oft-times filled with frost and snow flurries gave evidence. When western people naturally began to anticipate the fun and leisure that fall and winter would bring when work slacked off. The first thing that called for attention was a roof for the rink and at a community meeting the money for the materials was subscribed, the work to be done at a two days' bee, at which all who could possibly come would render their services free. A week later the roofed-in rink complete in every detail stood out like a great monument to the energetic and efficient manner in which western people take hold of their work.

By the time this had been accomplished, boxes of Christmas goods had arrived at the Badgerton Supply Company, taking every minute of Robert's time to open them up and display the goods. With the big crop and fair prices everything pointed to an exceptional busy Christmas. A letter from Mamie, however, was to fill his mind with another idea, which, up to this time, had never entered his mind till these lines of her letter brought it before him: "As you have omitted in any of your letters to say what time you expect to arrive home for Christmas, I am taking it for granted you will be here, and no excuse will be given any consideration." At first he thought it would be out of the question to ask time off, but the more he thought it over, he liked it. His profits from the farm investment would allow him to take care of all his liabilities, and still have sufficient to take this trip.

Two mornings later he made his request of Mr. Adams stating how much his friends at home wanted him to go back for Christmas. Mr. Adams, somewhat surprised, and recognizing the difficulties of getting experienced help to take his place during such a busy season, didn't know what to say. He realized the great attention Robert had given the business and that he was very conscientious in his dealings and he felt really he should let him go. He finally suggested that he would try to let him go the day after Christmas, getting him home for the New Year. This was better news than he had expected so he immediately wrote a short note

to Mamie, informing her of his intention, stating that business would not allow him to get home for Christmas.

So genial was his demeanor during those days before Christmas that customers, who knew his friendly disposition so well, could not help but remark on the special attention and courtesy he displayed. Such is the power that love holds in transforming and moulding our lives. A week before Christmas, on the Saturday night, Mr. Adams informed Robert that he had made arrangements with Paul Thomas, who was home from the city on a two-months' leave to visit his parents, and who was experienced in store work, to take his place for six weeks. In this way Robert could be home for Christmas, leaving on Monday's train. Robert now felt that with this good fortune, his cup of joy was running over and was profuse in his thanks to Mr. Adams for his consideration. He was so filled with plans for his trip and the problem as to whom he could get to take over his church work, and who would be best to leave in charge of the hockey team, that little time was given to sleep that night. Next day he was around early and in his own systematic way soon had all arrangements made and farewells taken of his most intimate friends. At first the members of the hockey team were displeased to think he was leaving after just getting them into good form, but when the train pulled in next morning, most of the members were there to wish him 'Bon Voyage' and a speedy return.

Three days later, in the dawn of early morn, he was stepping from the train at Metrople. Eighteen months had sped by since he had been here before, but what a difference there was in his outlook on life now! To-day he was buoyant with the feeling of respect given him and success attained, then only defeat and despair had filled his mind. During the stopover of seven hours here before his train left for home he was able to purchase the presents he had planned for his parents and friends. The most important and perplexing problem he had to solve was the size of ring that he had in mind for Mamie, so a visit to a leading jeweller was his first errand. Here he found that the matter of the size was not half as difficult as the selection of one of the sparkling gems that were placed before him, at a price he had figured on paying. When the sale had been made he found that he had paid fifty dollars more than he had expected. He then found himself interested in a beautiful gold locket and chain which he also bought to be engraved with the name, "Mamie." With

these purchases made, he now set about filling the balance of his list, and having spent less time than expected, he entered a photographer's and had his picture taken for his parents and Mamie.

After boarding the train for home he fell asleep and thus it seemed no time before he heard his station called. With the darkening shadows of another day closing in, the platform presented anything but a welcome appearance as the only persons in sight were the agent pushing an express truck and the mail-driver gathering up several sacks to put in his wagon. Walking quickly towards him, as he knew this was about his only chance of getting a ride to Centreton, Robert was pleased to see it was his old friend Pat Shea, who had been covering the mail circuit for the past fifteen years. Pat looked up in surprise as he heard his name called, then grasping Robert by the hand he exclaimed "Well, I'll be damned if it isn't Robbie Benson."

During the five mile drive Robert learned practically all that had transpired since he had left some two and a half years ago. The first sight of Centreton was most inviting, as a few scattered lights showed up in the distance, from the top of the hill. As they descended it, the old familiar places that had become so indelibly impressed on his mind, could be seen, such as the old building that had once served as the toll-gate, the blacksmith shop, the store, the Beacon Hotel with all its memories, and the little red church, beside which stood a little home that contained, for Robert, one of the world's greatest treasures.

Robert tried to visualize what Mamie would look like. Had she still retained that beauty with which he had been so captivated that first day at school, or when he had last kissed her good-bye? Of her love he felt assured, for had not every letter shown that underlying assurance of accord between them? By this time the gate of the manse garden had been reached and with a quick spring from the seat as the horses were brought to a stop by Pat, Robert was on the ground and looking towards the house expectantly. In a moment he had reached the doorway and rung the bell. If Mamie should answer what would be the proper way to greet her, he wondered. But the door was quickly opened by Mrs. Boswell, who with her kindly smile, said, "Will you step in?" thinking it was someone to see Mr. Boswell. This was different to what he'd expected, but he swallowed his disappointment as he offered his hand and asked, "How is Mrs. Boswell?" At the first word she immediately recognized his voice and was most effusive in

her greeting, adding an apology for not knowing him. Mr. Boswell, overhearing what had been said, rushed from the living-room into the hall, grasping Robert's hand as he said, "Can it be possible that it is my boy, Robert?" as he appraised his six feet of stalwart manhood.

"How you have changed," he continued. "I guess I can no longer call you a boy, eh? You have certainly surprised us for we were not expecting you for another week at least." Then taking off his coat he was ushered in beside the cheery coal fire, where he explained his early appearance. As he continued to look around the room, Mrs. Boswell sensed what was on his mind and hastened to let him know that Mamie had just gone to the store and was likely waiting for the mail.

"You have a chance to give her a surprise by stepping to the parlor when she returns," she said. It was only a few minutes before Mamie was heard rushing up the steps and into the room, all out of breath, asking for the parcel that Pat had told her about down at the office. "You will find it in the parlor," her mother answered, at the same time asking Mr. Boswell to give her a hand to hurry up supper. Stepping quickly to the door Mamie was barely inside before she was caught in a strong embrace and was only conscious of the word, "Mamie," as she received a passionate kiss and realized she was once again in Robert's arms. Looking up into his face with pride she put her arms around his neck as she tipped up her face to return his kiss. Then like a pair of guilty children they returned to the living-room where Mr. Boswell's considerate remarks put them both at their ease.

As Mamie went up to change her dress before supper, Robert made anxious enquiries about his family, their health and circumstances. Mr. Boswell replied that they had been doing splendidly during the past year, having rented the farm outright. They had had a good crop this past season, but the serious illness of his father, the year before, had no doubt been a big expense. At present he felt they were very comfortable and happy, and he knew they were taking an active part in the church work. A few minutes later, after a refreshing wash, Robert heard Mamie come out into the hall from her room and opening his door met her beneath the landing light. She was dressed in a fashionable gown of a new shade of blue that so strikingly set off her wealth of golden brown hair and rosy complexion, that to him,

she seemed more like a fairy goddess than flesh and blood, on whom he could cast a worshipful glance. But, was she not his? What more could be asked to make this life here an elysium? Taking his arm they both descended the steps, where the savory smells that appeal to the inner man were predominant. After the blessing had been asked, merry conversation and eating were in order while that enthralling charm that the Christmas spirit brings to the home when friends unite was ever present, so that it was nine-thirty before the diners rose from the table.

With Mr. Boswell retired to his study and Mrs. Boswell doing the dishes, the longed-for hour had at last arrived; that hour when all the world with its attractions, its beauty, its wealth, could not compare with the pleasure and thrill of again being seated side by side on the old-fashioned haircloth sofa. Here the broad shoulder acted as a pillow for a dainty reclining head, and language only understood by Cupid was used as two hearts beat as one. What was said did not matter, but Cupid's arrows frequently found their mark!

The next morning when Mamie flashed the glittering gem the salesman had so correctly judged as to size, before her parents at the breakfast table, they looked on with mingled pride and sorrow as they realized that they were soon to lose their only child as far as home companionship was concerned. Still, not wishing to show the depth of feeling it occasioned, they showered each with congratulations and in that good old-fashioned way that showed he fully believed in the faith he taught, Mr. Boswell asked them to kneel while he asked God's blessing to be ever with them, and his protecting grace to rest and abide with them throughout life.

After breakfast Robert went down to the store to meet his old friends, all curious to know of his success. Robert answered questions as briefly as possible, having learned that Jimmy had been home from Demoralburg during the summer, and had no doubt told his story of the misfortune that he had met with there. But he was enthusiastic in his recommendation of the opportunities that were offered in the West. At home Mamie was wondering whether she should accompany her father and Robert to his home, but on her mother's advice that Robert's mother would probably like her boy to herself for a while, at least, she decided not to go. The two also agreed that they would hold their Christmas dinner over till Sunday, as Mr. Boswell did not

have to go out to his outside appointments then, and Robert would be back from his home.

Two hours later Mr. Boswell and Robert were driving up a long lane, leading from the roadway, hedged on both sides by tall poplars standing like untrimmed obelisks pointing to the sky, to the comfortable-looking farm home where his parents resided. His mother, only recognizing Mr. Boswell's buggy and not its occupants, called her husband to come and help put Mr. Boswell's horse away. As she opened the door, Robert, with his grips in hand, stood before it. Quickly dropping his bags he took her in his arms as he exclaimed, "Mother". So overcome with joy was she that the only words she could say were, "It's Robert! It's Robert!" This brought his father and Mary to greet him with a rush, George being away at a neighbor's. Mr. Boswell whom they had not seen for some months was also given a warm reception, having always been looked upon by Mrs. Benson as a man of true integrity, sterling principles and a practical Christian.

After the excitement had died down, Mr. Benson took the horse to the stable. Mrs. Benson rushed around the kitchen getting them all something to eat with the help of Mary, now grown into a strong, beautiful girl. His father, having now returned from the stable and washing up, was ready just as Mrs. Benson announced they would all sit into dinner.

During the meal his father asked several questions about western life, which Robert was only too happy to answer, paying full tribute to the opportunities ever open there. When the last course had been served and Robert had finished his second piece of pie, his mother asked him to tell them of all that had happened since he went away, feeling that only in this way could she satisfy herself as to whether Robert had always been able to remain true to the faith he had taken from his home. Robert replied by relating to them there and then the complete story of his adventures, various scenes of employment, etc., with the exception of some of the incidents that had happened in Demoralburg, which, experience had taught him, they would not understand.

Mr. Boswell, who had sat through the recital a most interested listener, now took up the discussion by saying, "Mrs. Benson, you have a family of which you can be justly proud and in Robert a son whose sterling qualities make him an asset to any home. I have watched him grow from boyhood to robust manhood, capable of taking his place in the world and an example to

all young men, of the wisdom of early in life beginning to serve the Master. I know the foundations on which his life has been built and feel happy in the honor of having been instrumental in pointing out to him the way of life. I now see the consistent fruit of that effort in the knowledge of his work in the great mission field of a new country. What I am going to say next, I must ask his pardon for, but do so in the hope that you will share with us the pleasure of his company as often as possible during his short vacation, in view of the fact that he has conferred, not only upon my daughter, but our home, an honor in asking her to become his wife." At these words Mrs. Benson almost found the emotional strain too great to let her retain her composure. Not that she was displeased but because of her happiness. Finally, she said, "I am sure we cannot help but appreciate the kind words you have said and furthermore the pleasure and pride it gives us to know that Robert has never forgotten the girl whom we have learned to respect so highly and love for her admirable qualities. I know she cannot help but make him happy. Such welcome news gives greater pleasure at this happy season of the year! Now I want you all to spend Christmas with us to-morrow." Mr. Boswell accepted the invitation for his wife and Mamie as well as himself, leaving shortly afterwards in order to get over the slippery roads in daylight.

Looking across the fields, Robert noted George returning so he walked down to the barn to meet him. He received a real surprise when he saw how he had grown. It appeared almost impossible that a period of two and a half years would make such a difference as it does at this age, but was soon to learn that he retained his jovial good nature. George jumped down from the load and greeted his brother warmly as he said, "Well of all things, see what the winter has blown in!" They were soon chatting away together as they finished up the chores for the night before returning to the house for supper.

Supper over, they all pulled their chairs around the big base-burner, with its cheerful glow, while the conversation turned on various family matters and especially the success that had been given them there during the past year. George was particularly interested in Robert's farming investment and its quick profit, as he commented, "If that is the way money is made out West, it's me for the long grass in the spring!" Still full of talk but with a

thought for the morrow's heavy activities, the family retired to bed—at one o'clock!

The next morning with breakfast over, the chores done and the family busy in making preparations for the visitors, Robert slipped up to his room to get the presents he had for the family, and to put the names of some friends on several extra gifts he had bought in expectation of meeting with friends whom he might wish to remember in this way. On returning to the living-room where the Christmas tree had been placed near the old-style fireplace, he saw his mother looking out the window, humming words of an old hymn, so dropping his presents quietly on the table, he went to her and kissed her as he wished "Merry Christmas to the best of mothers." As they stood there together she put her arm lovingly round his waist as she said, "Robert, I want to tell you of the pleasure the knowledge of your engagement has given me and your father, for I have ever prayed and trusted that you should get such a good girl as Mamie to make you happy. Her exemplary habits and loving disposition make her a girl of outstanding merit. We have not seen her often except at vacation time, but we learned from her parents that you were in correspondence. So this engagement and the pleasure of having you all here for Christmas would seem almost too good to be true if it were not for the fact of my faith in our dear Heavenly Father." These words from his mother moved Robert deeply as he said quietly, "Mother, all these blessings I feel I owe to you, knowing as I do your prayers have ever been with me. You too are responsible for leading me to the fountain of truth, the only true source for all peace and happiness."

The door of the kitchen was now opened by George, returning with two large pails of milk, which he now hurried away to strain, and get the pails washed up, while Mary and Robert added a finishing touch to the tree. By this time, an old-style pleasure sleigh constituting one long bob, with a couple of bass sounding bells, was driving up to the door, containing five members of the Fallis family, who had been near neighbors at Mapleton. Before the men had returned from the barn another family of nearby neighbors had also arrived and within a half-hour an uncle and aunt of Robert's, also the Boswell's, who drove up in a cutter. After performing introductions all round and having a special private word and blessing for Mamie, Mrs. Benson set about the big task of the day—preparing the dinner—while Robert became

the centre of attraction as a foundation of information about western farming. An hour later, with two big turkeys cooked to a turn and tables groaning with the weight of the good things with which they were laden, eighteen were soon seated before an appetizing Christmas dinner, on which Mr. Boswell was called upon to ask blessing.

Some two hours were then spent in partaking of the bounteous dinner which had taken hours of unselfish work on the part of Mrs. Benson to produce. Near the end, George asked to be excused to go and feed the horses, as an excuse to return a short time later impersonating that faithful old friend, who is never outgrown by the old and so welcome by the young, Santa Claus.

For the next hour he filled the time with mirth-producing witticisms and repartee as he distributed the gifts from the tree, everyone being well-remembered. Two special gifts were from Robert, to his mother a beautiful silk dress and to Mamie a small plush box. The latter when opened revealed a locket and chain. On the locket the word "Mamie" was spelt in beautiful stones and inside it was a small photo of himself on which was written, "From the one who will ever be with you in spirit." As Santa's work was now complete he expressed his regrets at having to hurry on his great mission of goodwill, and soon the jingle of his sleigh-bells were heard as the door closed behind him. But the Christmas spirit he had left behind was now taken up in earnest by Mamie and Edith Fallis, taking turns at the organ and playing many of the old-time favorite songs and hymns, which were sung with great enthusiasm that shuts out from all sorrow and worry. By the time they had grown tired and began to show desire for a change, it was again time for supper, Mrs. Benson having already started to set the table which she was advised against doing by several who claimed they had only got up from dinner.

Soon Mrs. Benson announced supper, and after supper the table was quickly cleared away in order that several games that had been planned, could be played, and the hours then passed so quickly that when Mr. Boswell took out his watch, he discovered that it was already past eleven o'clock.

With the departure of the Boswell's the party began to break up and soon the only ones remaining were a few friends whom Mrs. Benson had persuaded to stay overnight. Shortly, everyone, tired

with the excitement of the day, had retired to the peace of comfortable beds.

Robert was up bright and early next morning helping with the chores before getting ready for church, there to meet Mamie again. In plenty of time, George drove up to the door with a spirited team, which the owner had left with the other stock when Mr. Benson had taken it over, and with Robert and Mary at his side soon reached Centreton. As he halted before the church, George told Robert that Mary and he would call back for him and Mamie next afternoon, thus relieving any anxiety he had about transportation.

When Robert entered the church he was met by a number of his old associates, who were so eager to hear further of his experiences, they were all soon seated around the big stove, the usual gathering place for discussions before service. Later with the strains of the organ voluntary Mamie was playing ringing in his ears, he entered the church, going to sit with Mr. Jones, his former employer, and his wife. Following a stirring appeal to the younger members of the congregation to pattern their lives on Jesus Christ and his way of living, and to give of their time in bringing others into the Fold, Rev. Boswell made several laudatory remarks about Robert. He referred to the pleasure it gave him to again have Robert Benson present, for he, only a few years ago, had come to the throne of grace during the Evangelical meetings that were being carried on in the church. Now he was serving the Master in the great vineyards of the West, in proclaiming the truth as Bible class teacher and superintendent.

After the service he again became the centre of attention, as several of the older members came forward to tender him their congratulations on the manner in which he was taking up the Work, till Mamie appeared with a sparkle in her eyes that cast its hypnotizing influence upon him and made him quickly follow after first taking leave of his friends. They then left the church and were soon cozily seated in the parlor while Mrs. Boswell prepared dinner. The afternoon was spent quietly discussing various topics and a new plan of Mr. Boswell's to obtain more efficient work from the members of his congregation.

After supper Mr. Boswell and his wife announced to Robert that they had to fill an engagement of long standing with Deacon Reid and his wife at their home that evening, so they would be compelled to leave them alone. Although expressing his regret,

Robert could not help but feel happy to have the chance to be alone with his dear one. The hours sped swiftly by till soon the footsteps of Mamie's parents were heard coming up the steps, when the old family album was snatched up and both were discovered trying to remember the original of one of the tin-types that showed up from its pages like a character from mythology, who Mrs. Boswell drily observed was a great aunt living in England. Then, after a few words of general conversation, the Boswells retired to bed, leaving the lovers undisturbed once more. Now the album was replaced and it was not long till the whispered words of endearment accompanied by several impetuous kisses made it easy for Robert to talk of their immediate plans and future together. "Mamie, my dear," he said, "when I hold you in my arms like this, the world seems such a different place, that I hate to think of ever going away without you, but I know under the circumstances that this will not be possible. Therefore, I want you to tell me when I can come and claim you as my own." Acting at first as if startled by the sudden change in the trend of the conversation, Mamie said, "Robert, since you placed this beautiful ring on my finger that thought has been most in my mind as I realized you would want to know before you returned. Well, I have talked it over with mother, who although perfectly willing to abide by my own decision, feels I would be well-advised to finish my course and graduate first, which you know will not be for another year. She also feels that if we were married before another year, I would be a handicap to you in the carrying out of your plans. So if you consider this best, there is plenty of time and no date need be decided on at the present time. That can be arranged easily to suit your convenience. But, after the first of another year, as far as can be foreseen, would be satisfactory to me," she concluded, as she put her lips to his in a lingering kiss. Their embrace concluded, Robert at first gave the impression of being hurt. A year from now looked a long way off. Still he was quick to recognize the good judgment that had prompted such reasoning, and after several hours spent in discussing it from many angles, Mamie's idea was mutually agreed upon. By now the wee small hours had arrived so with careful steps they went up the creaky stairway to their rooms.

Robert spent next morning calling on his former school chums, from all of whom he received warm greetings. In the afternoon, back again at the Boswells' he entertained Mamie and her parents

with many interesting anecdotes of western life. Indeed, Mr. Boswell became so enthused by the description he was given of the sincerity and simplicity of the life of the people, that the thought came to his mind if Mamie was going to make this new country her home, there was no reason why they should not go and be near her, for the outlook was so much more promising. For all the years of hard work and service that had been spent on the work at Centreton, the harvest of souls to seek salvation was very small.

During the late afternoon, George drove up and being met by Mrs. Boswell was easily persuaded to bring Mary in from the sleigh to stay over with Robert for supper. George soon had the horses put away and supper was served a short time later, after which the evening was spent in music and singing, both parents showing by their continued requests for them to remain a little longer, that they hated to see their daughter going away from them to Robert's for the balance of the week. But the time finally came when George had the team of horses before the door, straining at their bits, eager to get away. So, with several merry good-byes, they were soon seated in the sleigh and speeding homeward.

The balance of the week was made a continual round of parties, many of which were given in honor of Mamie and Robert by friends of the popular Mary and George, so that the time passed by like a dream. With one more day remaining, New Year's, Mrs. Benson again invited the Boswells to spend it with them, knowing that the young people would desire to be together and feeling it would be so much nicer to spend it quietly. Mrs. Boswell was heard to remark she could not remember ever having spent a more enjoyable day so free from nervous strain, with everyone so much in accord, for with the Christmas festivities it seemed that ever since Mamie had come home she had really had no time to visit with her. Now only a few days left till she would have to return. To Mamie, this seemed an opportune time to make a request, that Robert and she had already discussed, to wit, that she be allowed to remain another ten days at home. With a little extra work on her return to college she could easily catch up the lessons she would miss, she thought. Her parents, though very interested in having her give the best attention she could to her studies, thought that, under the circumstances, it would be alright and were not hard to persuade, so that they decided then and

there that she would not return for two weeks. This was good news to Robert, but it served to remind him, too, that it would soon be time to return west! The day now being far spent Mr. Boswell reminded them it was again time to be making a start home, so with a pressing invitation to Mr. and Mrs. Benson to visit them while Robert was at home they were again on their way, leaving another happy day only a memory.

CHAPTER 19

"Love is the crowning grace of humanity, the holiest right of the soul, the golden link which binds us to duty and truth, the redeeming principle that chiefly reconciles the heart to life and is prophetic of eternal good."—Petrarch..

THE TWO weeks that followed passed, for Robert and Mamie, in a succession of parties and visits to friends, until the last day of Mamie's vacation arrived. Robert, with a further two weeks to go, had promised to stop off at Metrople and spend his last three days there, to see her once more, so she was not too upset at leaving now.

Their last evening together was spent at Mamie's, Robert staying over-night, and as the Boswells considerably retired early, the lovers were able to have a few love-filled hours together before retiring. Next morning both were up early looking fresh and fit and giving no sign of the long vigil kept with Cupid. After breakfast, when everything was in readiness for the trip, her father decided the going was too heavy for three in the cutter, so Robert remained with her mother. The trying time of saying good-bye had now arrived and Mamie hid her feelings as much as she could when thanking her mother for everything. Then she turned to Robert with out-stretched hand, as if undecided what to do next, but with the firm embrace he took her in his arms and kissing her passionately said, "Good-bye, Mamie, and don't forget those letters till I see you again!" Mamie, and father were soon seated in the cutter, waving a last farewell as they approached the long hill that was to shield them from view. They had barely arrived at the station when the train pulled in, so only a hurried good-bye was possible, but Mr. Boswell found time to say, "God bless you and keep you and remember your church," as he helped her on to the train.

That afternoon George called for Robert as arranged, for he intended spending the balance of the holidays quietly at home visiting with his parents. So, with the exception of the odd evening spent in going out with George and Mary he spent his time in

reminiscing and talking over things with them and doing the odd job round the house. Only too soon the last day came round and the last evening was spent at home with all of the members being there together. His mother told him of the happiness that his material success had given her, but stressed the fact that the knowledge of his continued good work in the Master's service gave her the greater happiness. As she voiced her regret at the distance which would soon separate them, Robert told her that he would again be home in a year to take Mamie back, explaining that the call of the West would not allow him to return to the East to work. As the hour grew late Mrs. Benson asked all to kneel, while she offered up a prayer to the throne of grace, asking God's blessing and protection and care till again they should all meet within the portals of the home.

The next morning the weather was cold and rough with disagreeable sleet blowing from the north-east, which made an early start necessary for the long trip. After embracing and kissing his mother, father and Mary, Robert, feeling the stress of emotion, stepped in the sleigh and driving down the tree-lined lane to the roadway, waved back a last farewell till it had been reached. The roads were so slippery causing loss of time that they were obliged to take a short-cut, reaching the station a few minutes before the train pulled in. In spite of this, George could not allow the opportunity to pass without some jest, which made the parting so much easier than at home, saying, as Robert took his hand, "Good-bye old top, and you can count on my looking after your interests when the holidays come round again, if I don't drop in on you this spring." With a knowing smile and hearty handshake Robert acknowledged his brother's sympathetic way of expressing his feelings and stepped on the train. Taking a magazine from his pocket he had become just nicely interested in a story when Metrople was reached, where the pleasure of again meeting Mamie quickly set aside all other thoughts.

As he pushed his way through the crowd towards the waiting-room where he had arranged to meet Mamie, an arm slipped into his as a voice he knew so well said, "Why, Robert, don't you know your friends?" Acting on the impulse of the moment, he drew her to him with a bear-like hug and kissed her before he was aware she was accompanied by one of her chums. This called for an apology, while Mamie, cheeks flushed red, tried to laugh off the incident by calling attention to Robert's impulsive manner. Her

friend, with understanding courtesy added jovially, "That's just the kind of instruction our professor was giving us the other day; he said, 'Whatever you do, do well'," at which they all laughed again. Then introducing her friend as Barbara Jenkins, the daughter of the lady at whose home she stayed, they walked towards the doorway, Robert asking the girls to join him in having lunch at a nearby restaurant. The afternoon was spent in visiting several places of interest and, as evening approached, Robert suggested that they go to his hotel for supper and then take in a hockey match, at which he hoped to pick up some good pointers to take back to his team. On Mamie's suggestion, Barbara's friend, Roy Palmer, was included and joined them at the hotel. The game proved to be exciting and instructional for Robert. Then they walked him back to the hotel, but Robert, making plans with them for the next day, could not help but wonder how he was to get some time alone with Mamie, as the next evening would be his last, the train leaving at nine on the evening following.

The next morning his problem was solved in a most satisfactory manner, as on calling at the Jenkins' home for Mamie to go shopping, he was met at the door by Barbara, who showed by her welcome that he had a warm friend in her, as she quickly called her mother and introduced them. Mrs. Jenkins showed her friendliness by inviting him for evening dinner and the evening, as the girls had arranged to have a few friends in for music and games. She wanted him to make himself at home during his short stay, she said, as she had heard Mamie mention him so often she felt she already knew him. Robert, greatly surprised at this good fortune, thanked her, asking her to accompany the girls and himself to a matinee that afternoon, to which she finally agreed.

Robert and Mamie then left for the shopping tour they had planned, only to enter a large restaurant an hour later when Robert decided he wanted some lunch, as he had not been able to eat much breakfast. Two hours passed only too quickly and then they left to meet their friends at the theatre. After the show, which was thoroughly enjoyed by everyone in the party, they all returned to the Jenkins home where supper was served. The evening's entertainment commenced shortly after when a number of boys and girls, friends of Mamie and Barbara, arrived and games and music were the order of the evening. Light refreshments were served and afterwards the guests left for their homes. Then Mrs. Jenkins, with kindness and understanding, turned to Robert and

Mamie, as she said, "Now, Mr. Benson, I know Mamie has several things she has not had a chance to tell you, so I am going to leave her as your hostess, and trust you will make yourselves at home, and that you will arrange to be with us as early as possible tomorrow afternoon, and for dinner, too." Then with a pleasant good-night, Barbara and she went up to bed.

Once again they were able to exchange confidences and dream of their future together, even as they exchanged passionate kisses and embraces, until the bells in a distant clock tower made them realize their usual bed-time. Quickly kissing Mamie good-night, Robert said, "Au Revoir, dear, until to-morrow," then passed into the night. He was soon back at his hotel and into his bed, excited, but tired enough to sleep soundly.

Next morning Robert attended church with Mamie, Barbara and Roy, returning to Robert's hotel in response to his invitation for lunch. A long walk in the afternoon enjoying the bright sunshine sharpened their appetites, so that they were all able to enjoy the dinner that was being served early at the Jenkins, in order that they might have a long evening before it was time for Robert to leave for the train. The early evening was spent in music and singing of many of the old favorite hymns and in interesting discussion with Mr. and Mrs. Jenkins on the life in the West. Finally the time came for Robert to leave for the hotel, where he still had some packing to do, so thanking the Jenkins for their kindness he left, accompanied by Mamie, Barbara and Roy. Although there seemed but little time lost, they reached the station only minutes before the train was due to leave.

When his checking was completed, there was but a few minutes left, which was spent by Roy and Barbara in making humorous jests as to the best way to look after Mamie after he had gone, all of which helped greatly to alleviate the last few trying minutes. With the echoing notes of the train announcer calling "Train for Western Canada on track four," Robert embraced Mamie fervently in a rush of passion as he said, "It won't be long till I am back again. Till then good-bye, dearest." He swung aboard the train as Mamie walked away, her eyes blinded with scalding tears.

CHAPTER 20

"Have a goal in life worthwhile and you will be surprised how much better you will play the game."—Nota Bene.

THE fleeting train now sped into the starless night, with each blow of its shrill whistle seeming to mock at love as it tore apart two hearts which had been so closely united together for the past six weeks. Robert sat with an unopened magazine before him, plans flooding his brain as to how quickly he could realize his greatest ambition of bringing Mamie out as his wife. Under this spell the dawning light of another day brought him to quick realization of how the time passes when the mind is actively and pleasantly employed. A short time later, hearing the first call for breakfast, he had a refreshing wash before eating and then settled down for the three days' trip to Badgerton. On the morning of the second day he learned that the train was nearing Capitola, where he was to transfer to a branch line.

The stopover of about three hours gave time for a short walk and breakfast and then he resumed his journey, filling in the time looking over the boundless prairie glistening in its sparkling mantle of snow, as the winter sun so sparingly reflected two large sun dogs, denoting the cold crisp weather of February. The evening twilight had just begun to settle when the stentorian voice of the brakeman call, "Badgerton next stop," the name that brought Robert a thrill as he thought of his many friends and the work he had so much enjoyed. The grinding brakes soon brought the train to a stop and no sooner had he set foot on the platform, than he was surrounded by several members of the hockey team, who were looking for his return with special interest, as they gave him a welcome in true western spirit.

At the store a further welcome was extended him by Mr. and Mrs. Adams along with several customers and his friend Sandy, who greeted him in his usual matter-of-fact way. Supper having just been announced, and the customers leaving to get their mail, the store was locked so they could enjoy their meal together and receive particulars of the East. Robert gave a full account of

his trip and in turn was told all the local news of interest, particular attention being given by Mr. Adams to the hockey games lost by the team. With the store open again and an inspection of the stock revealing that several days' work would be required to get it into shape, Robert had just began a discussion of the business when two members of the hockey team rushed in demanding he attend a team meeting right away.

Remembering the recent string of losses, especially the defeat they had met against their bitter opponent, Gopher Hill, by a score of seven to two, and informed that the return game, which was the final, had been arranged for a week from the following Tuesday, the old spirit was soon aroused and Robert found himself once again at Frank's Barber Shop, always requisitioned for sports meetings. Taking over the chair from Carl Freiburg, who had acted as manager during his absence, Robert started a general discussion as to who should compose the team for the final game finally agreeing with some reluctance, and promise to practice vigorously for the next nine days, to captain the team in that important date. The treasurer's report showed ninety-two dollars on hand, and a letter with a cheque for sixty-eight dollars and fifty cents was received from the Girls Terpsichorean Club with the request that it be used for new outfits! As it was known that the Gopher Hill team had ordered new outfits for the game, it was decided that the Badgers must have theirs, too, even if time was short, the colours to be red and white with the name "Badgers" thereon. The meeting over Robert went back to the store and dispatched a wire ordering the suits for the 10th inst.

Back in harness again Robert found that the store work, church meetings, choir work and hockey practice left him little time to himself and even his first letter back to Mamie took three days to finish up. However, with the peace of mind that congenial work affords, and living over again many of the pleasures his trip had given him, he felt an inward consciousness that the blessings he was enjoying were the fruits of living a God-fearing life, for was the promise not given, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things shall be added to you"? In a spirit of true thankfulness his prayerful devotions were made daily.

The date of the big game was speeding around all too quickly, especially for Robert to whom the first few practices seemed sheer agony as he tried to get into shape. After a gruelling week, two

hours every night, he seemed to have a new elasticity, so that two nights before the game it was conceded he had rounded back to his old form as expected.

The morning of the big game a cold Nor'wester with drifting blasts of piercing snow seemed to search out every crack and crevice. Everyone was afraid the game would have to be called, but by noon the wind had gone down, there were flashes of sunshine and before another hour had passed the day was ideal, cold and frosty just the kind to give hockey its proper pep.

Long before the game was due to start the entire standing room space of the big rink had been filled, with dozens more sitting on the rafters. Following the judge of play and referee, both outsiders and neutral, the Gopher Hill team then took the ice, looking quite smart in their new outfits of black and gold and were greeted vociferously by their supporters. The "Badgers" then made their appearance and their supporters, as though not to be outdone, seemed to make the crisp air vibrate with their shouting, as they greeted them.

At the sound of the bell both teams quickly took their respective places, the puck was dropped and with a resounding roar of "They're away," the game was on. Gopher Hill, getting the puck, rushed it up centre ice, their forward just about to shoot on goal, when Freiburg in one of his mad rushes, landed on him with such force that both went sliding to the side of the rink. A cry of "foul" demanded the attention of the referee, but the judge of play who had seen how the incident happened, quickly informed him and the play was continued. Several rushes showing considerable speed and good stick-handling by the visitors at once convinced those who had witnessed last year's game that it was an entirely different team that had to be contended with to-day. Several fast shots were made on Badger's goal the first few minutes of play, which only for Ken's remarkable work would have made the count go up quickly. Finally a Gopher forward, getting the puck and making a quick circle back of the Badgers' goal rushed to centre and shooting the puck to the wall caught it on the rebound and with a neat lift landed it in the Badgers' goal. Another nicely played shot from the right of goal by Gopher Hill made the count two and Badger supporters began to worry, especially as it was noted that Gopher Hill had considerable the best of the game so far, outside the score.

It seemed the hand of the referee had hardly gone up till the

bell announced the playoff again and this time the Badgers made a serious attack on the Gopher Hill goal only to have Gopher Hill forwards break it up, snatch the puck and ram it into the Badgers' goal in a mad scramble of players and sticks. This being the third goal it began to look so much like a whitewash that all noise-makers that Gopher Hill seemed so well-loaded with were brought into use. However with only seven minutes to go till half-time, Robert and Freiburg in a well-supported rush, managed to get through the Gopher defence, the latter lifting the puck in to make the score three to one. This gave the pent-up feelings of the Badger supporters some relief and they continued to cheer and hammer the boards till the noise was sufficient to make one believe pandemonium had broken loose.

Half time being called the teams quickly left the ice for a much-needed breathing spell, while the crowd, now keyed to a high pitch of excitement, was offering many bets, Gopher Hill supporters in particular, being confident of victory. On entering the waiting room, each side took up its respective corners in opposite ends, surrounded by a capacity gathering of their fans. In the meantime Robert had gathered his team together and was outlining to them in subdued tones, his plans for various plays to be tried out in the second half, as unless some change was brought into effect, he felt they were doomed to real defeat at the hands of the so-far superior Gopher Hill players.

As the teams passed out onto the ice, the jubilant expression of the Gopher Hill players seemed to say, "It won't be long now," while the set jaw and steel-eyed looks of the Badgers denoted it was a case of "do or die." Robert and the captain of the Gopher Hill team were called by the referee for the play-off, positions were taken, sticks in readiness, the puck was tossed and a quick strike from the Gopher Hill captain sent it flying to the side of one of his forwards, who was away with it. He lost it at once to a Badger forward and it seemed like a lightning flash till they were at the Gopher Hill's goal. A shot was made but it was nicely stopped by the goal-keeper. Several times it was regained by Gopher Hill, but each time lost. A mix-up between Gopher Hill defence and the Badgers' forwards gave the opportunity for a nice combination pass to Robert on the right who at once neatly lifted it into the net. It had been played so fast that few had seen the shot except the judge of play, who at once raised his hand to the referee, to give the Badgers the decision. This was all that was needed to start off

another wave of rejoicing by the Badger fans, which, of course, helped the team considerably.

After that goal the puck was played so close that no chance was given by either side to lift it except when off-sides called for play-offs. It was after the fourth offside that the Gopher Hill captain rushed down centre ice with such speed that the Badgers had no chance of overtaking him and it looked as though another goal would be added to their score. However, Freiburg, rushing forward caught the Gopher in the act of making one of his quick turns and jamming him with his shoulder caught him with such force that he was thrown against the side of the rink, luckily in such a manner as to come off unhurt. Freiburg then was away with the puck and in the excitement of the moment forgot to wait for a ruling and continued right up to Gopher Hill goal, no one seemingly desirous of body-checking him after noting the manner in which their captain had been left. He appeared to be rushing through to deliver it to Robert, but with a nice turn of the stick, netted another goal.

With the score even, the excitement now reached fever heat, and Gopher Hill, noting the changed playing of the Badgers, believed it to have been their final rally, figuring that Robert had not sufficient practice or wind to stand the strain they had been playing under. With the next play-off fate took a hand it seemed, for no sooner had the puck been faced than it was sent off to the side where a Gopher Hill forward gave it a nice lift that sent it like a shot through the air towards the Badgers' goal, and hitting a cross-beam just above, it dropped into the net. It was all done so quickly not even Ken, the goal-keeper, could be convinced of what had happened till the man behind the net pointed it out. But, the usual shouting and noise gave evidence that it counted!

With Robert evening the score while a Gopher was penalized off the ice, the Badger fans almost lost control of themselves in their delight, but with only three minutes to play no time was lost by the referee in centreing the puck. Before it hit the ice it was knocked to one side by a Gopher Hill player and at once taken by his captain, who lost it again to Freiburg, while in the act of jumping over his stick. With a nice left Freiburg passed it to a forward, past centre ice and from there on followed some exceptionally nice stick-handling and combination playing. Gopher Hill, recognizing that defensive tactics were no good played much the same rushing game as the Badgers. With each team pressing hard,

scoring remained at a standstill until two minutes had passed and everything pointed to the game ending in a tie, unless overtime was played. Then a Badger forward managed to pull the puck out of a jam, lifting it to Robert, who having a clear opening, sent it with the speed of a bullet towards the goal, at once following as the sharp eye of the goal-keeper had seen it in time to use his shield to good effect. As it dropped, however, Robert was upon it again, driving it hard into the net just as the timekeeper called time! The climax had come too unexpectedly, and in the nick of time, that the fans seemed spellbound for the instant, but as the referee declared the winners and congratulated both teams on the wonderful exhibition they had given after only two seasons' play, the crowd rushed the winners off their feet and carried them, shoulder high, to the dressing room.

The game had proved such a real exhibition of hockey with such clean playing—only two penalties—that the Gopher Hill supporters left the rink with entirely different ideas from those of a year ago, recognizing that the Badgers had won in a most creditable manner. Every man of their own team had worked like a Trojan, too, so that no matter who held the laurels of victory, they felt it was an honor to have had their team in such a game. Once more the finals in this great Canadian winter sport for Golden Plains District had been finished.

CHAPTER 21

"It is well to remember that before the oak shells forth its acorns, it had to become firmly rooted, which was done not only by sunshine but in withstanding the trials of storms and tempests."—Nota Bene.

WITH the hockey finals, curling bonspiels over and the long winter months of frost and snow but history, the bright ray of the March sun seemed to act like an electric current giving light and power to the hardy inhabitants. Robert, who was affected by the brighter atmosphere and the invigorating air was trying to arrive at a definite plan for the working of his farm during the coming season. He was undecided as to whether he would be further ahead to rent it outright or to again give it out on shares, as now, with fifty acres of breaking already for the drill, there was the chance, with a good crop, of making a big payment on the balance owing. He decided to get Sandy's advice, knowing he would get the best there was from him.

Sipping a cup of tea with Sandy Robert explained why he had come over. Sandy was only too glad to give any advice he could, he said, but before going into the matter, he had a proposition he wanted to discuss with Robert, and as soon as they had finished supper, they would go into the matter fully. After supper, Sandy sitting comfortably near the stove, his old briar working like a blacksmith's forge, said, "Robert, it seems a coincidence that you should come over as I was going to discuss this proposition with you to-morrow if I had a chance, when I was up for the mail. I could not act definitely till I received a letter that came a few days ago. The proposition is this: The quarter section adjoining your's on the south belongs to Henry Baxter, who, you know was called back to England while you were away due to sickness of his father. The father died, leaving Henry a large estate in the old land, so he wrote me sometime ago about trying to rent this land here or sell it for him. I at once wrote back for a definite price and received those details in the last letter. As you know there are ninety acres broken, nearly all of which is suitable for crop, seven

horses, implements, seed and feed. To me it is too good a chance for you to pass up as everything is there with which to work it and George Meredith, who has been looking after the stock, could no doubt be hired to remain on. He is a good man. The price as it stands is only twenty-five hundred dollars, although at first he was holding out for three thousand dollars. He stated I could use my own judgment if I made a sale to a good man."

Robert was pleased, but when he thought of the money and the hours of toil it represented to him, he said, "Sandy, you know I appreciate your kindly interest in giving me first chance, and you know I'd like to have it, but the idea of going so much in debt would worry me so I would have no pleasure in its ownership. I must tell you, too, that I'm engaged and would like to be married in another year. This information he thought Sandy did not favor, as he observed a faraway look in his eyes. Then as if a new thought had struck him, he said, in as near to reaching an enthusiastic tone of voice, as Robert had ever known, "That is all the more reason, my boy, for the deal to go through! And we shall build a cottage on that knoll, where the shack now stands, that will be second to none in the district, and what money you need to do it, I shall give you at bank interest on a promissory note as I am convinced that outside of the first payment, the place will pay for itself." Robert said that he had only three hundred and fifty dollars in the bank, but Sandy said that was enough to swing the deal. In order to get the price of twenty-five hundred dollars, however, the down payment would be five hundred dollars. If Robert felt he would like to take hold of the place, which was a big opportunity, he, Sandy, would advance him the difference. The idea almost sold itself to Robert, when he recollected some words he had heard his mother repeat, "Debt is the rope with which fools hang themselves." This thought made him cautious, and although Sandy gave figures to show how easily it could be handled, Robert stated he would like to think it over till he came into town to-morrow, to which Sandy quickly agreed.

Robert at once returned home but instead of sleeping his mind was engaged in debating Sandy's proposition. He thrilled at the idea of owning a farm so near town, but he hated to assume the debt entailed. No, the chance was too great to take. But then the idea of the cottage came before him and he realized he would need a proper home for Mamie next year. The more he thought of this suggestion, the more he liked it, and he decided to tell

Sandy he would take advantage of the opportunity to get the place and thank him also for the offer which would let him build a house.

Next day Robert told Sandy when he came for the mail and he in turn congratulated him on his good judgment. But Sandy also told him that he would be well-advised to leave the store in time to help with the seeding, provided he arranged with George to remain on. To back up his advice he quoted a verse from Matt. 6 verse 24, "No man can serve two masters for he will either hate the one, and love the other, or else hold to the one and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and Mammon."

This set Robert thinking, for after the way he had been treated by Mr. Adams, he felt he could hardly work up enough courage to tell him he was leaving in the busy season. The more he considered what Sandy had said, the deeper the impression was made on his mind, that already, during a good many hours of the day, his mind was working out plans for the farm, in place of giving that conscientious duty for which he knew he was receiving good wages. Finally some days later, when the sale had been fully completed, he went to Mr. Adams and told him of his plans. He said he felt to remain that he could not give him the service he was being paid for. Mr. Adams, however, did not take him seriously, as he said, "Why, Robert, you can get two men to do the work on the farm for the wages you are earning here, and I think in the long run it will prove satisfactory to us both."

The matter was then dropped till another month had passed when, due to continued cold weather and Spring proving backward, seeding became considerably delayed. May had now come and very little work had yet been done, so following Sandy's advice, Robert again approached his employer as the unseasonable weather made a good excuse, because in addition to holding up seeding, business had considerably fallen off. Finally Mr. Adams agreed to a month's leave for him, trusting that amount of time would be sufficient. Once the way was opened, Robert felt it would be much easier to have the time extended than demand too much now.

Three days later, with arrangements made for George to carry on, Robert was busily engaged seeding the summerfallow with a four-horse team on the seeder. Because it was the first time he had ever driven four horses, he found at the start, considerable difficulty in getting the drill in even at the ends, thus leaving large patches unseeded, and being particular with his work, he soon noticed.

From his past experience in farm work, however, he soon accustomed himself to gauge the distance correctly. The drill being followed by George with the harrows, the grain was left in well-worked seed bed. With most of his seeding done, after two weeks, George was enabled to start plowing for green feed. Monday evening of the third week found Robert busily studying over the plans for his new cottage, thrilled with pleasure and picturing in his mind all the many little conveniences that he proposed adding to make it the kind of home that he felt assured Mamie would delight in. Carl Freiburg, with whom he had grown very friendly through their hockey association and farms cornering, had come over to ask him to exchange work, offering to help him with the cottage basement in return for seeding help a few days later. This was quite agreeable as Robert felt the assistance offered was just what he needed to dig out the basement on which he purposed starting next morning. Three days later, with Carl's help, the basement was not only completed, but the soil removed and nicely levelled. This would later be made into a lawn. Also all the lumber was placed in readiness to start building. By this time, Carl's land was in shape to seed and with Robert's two outfits, the end of the week saw all completed.

By Monday morning the masons were starting on the stone foundation, keeping Robert busy getting the different supplies required, as well as acting as cook for eight men. This required so much more than he had figured on that many of the other jobs he had hoped to finish were left undone. George had started breaking on the new quarter, as it was always felt necessary each season to get as much broken as possible during the short breaking season before the roots secured too strong a hold or the land becomes too dry.

In a month the house was well on the way to completion, the whole exterior having been completed. To Robert, who could see so many things to do, it seemed only nicely started, and as he stood outside reviewing the work to be done and thinking how impossible it would be to finish it properly if he had to go back to the store next week, when the month was up, Sandy drove into the yard. After an inspection of the six rooms, Sandy was quite profuse in his praise, reminding Robert that with much more work to be done and a return to the store soon due, he would have to consider his own interests. He would have to tell Mr. Adams in a

business-like way his position and ask him to extend the time. If he did not see fit to do so, Robert's best policy would be to resign.

He was agreeably surprised, when speaking to Mr. Adams, on being told that, as the boy hired in his place had proven satisfactory, he could stay off through the summer. He would, though, like Robert to come back as early in the Fall as possible. Robert was not aware, however, that Sandy with whom he had driven into town, had made it a point to see his employer first, securing his sympathetic understanding of Robert's plight. Such is the way a true friend helps one along life's pathway. With the matter settled amicably Robert began to think of the painting of the house, the colors to be decided on and the hundred and one things, small in a way, which would help make a real home, worthy of Mamie. A few days later, he was to have a still further surprise when Sandy came over and advised him that, as he had finished most of his regular work, he was going to give him a hand, which Robert greatly appreciated knowing how systematic and particular Sandy was in everything.

The carpenters, having completed the interior work the day previous, everything was now in readiness for the finishing touches, which with hard work, at which both were adepts, and with long hours, were soon added. Before two weeks had passed, the rising knoll, commanding the rolling prairie, no doubt used at some earlier date as an observation point by some Indian chief, watching his braves driving the herds of buffalo from the river just beyond, was graced by a homey cottage of the bungalow type. Where but a short time before a couple of half-rotted hay stacks partly fenced with poplar sticks and barbed wire had acted as the only landmark for miles to those who followed the winding trails, now stood a finer landmark—a home. Keeping step with the march of progress, painted in striking colors of green and white, it seemed to shine out against the evening sunset like a polished jewel in a beautiful setting of verdant green.

With the house completed, Sandy undertook to provide a garden and hedge of trees, using some of the trees sent out by the Government free, but under special restrictions. The care and precision he had shown in planting was fully revealed six weeks later during the height of the western growing season in July, as with ideal growing weather they had, by then, practically all taken root, producing a healthy foliage of green leaves.

Haying season was now ushered in by cutting the grass from

selected sloughs on vacant land, some of which required permits, while others cut it from high prairie land. The haying season is usually overlapped by harvest and this season proved no exception, for before Robert had got through cutting, let alone stacking, the waving fields of wheat commenced to show a golden tint which was sufficient notice for those acquainted with western harvest, which at times is brought in so hurriedly by hot dry winds, that everything must be in readiness for this important season.

Everyone took time, as it was, by the forelock, working early and late in order to get their stacking completed, but even with the Herculean effort that was put forth, about one-third of the hay still remained in great heaps, where it had been cut, when a three-days' wind from the south-east, like the waves from a fiery forge, transformed the fields of green into a sea that from the distance looked like molten gold. Almost at once, it seemed the air was charged with the merry hum of the binder with its ceaseless chug in all directions, as it left behind it row upon row of sheaves for the farmers' sturdy hand of toil to place in position for final maturing. Harvesting went merrily on till soon the fertile fields with their golden background looked like great avenues with their parallel lines of stooks stretching away into the distance as if the panoramic view was some gigantic criss-cross puzzle, soon to be solved by the power of the thresher's hand.

Robert and his neighbors who had about completed wheat-cutting had everything in readiness to start at Dave Dunmore's, who owned an outfit on a farm adjoining Sandy's and as customary, threshed his own grain first. Whether it was fate or just the thought of an old superstition about the unluckiness of Friday the thirteenth, it was always to stand out in Robert's life as a day endowed with sinister influences.

The next morning had broken bright and clear, but as the sun commenced to rise, the unmistakable signs of wind quickly began to make their appearance. These always brings chagrin to any thresher, due to the many inconveniences caused and danger from fire. By the time everything should have been ready to start the big belt on the thresher into action, the wind had grown so strong as to make threshing impossible as it continued to gain in velocity. So, Robert decided he would go over and help Sandy to put some new bins in his granary, which he knew he intended doing. The job was about half completed when the dinner hour

came around. When the meal was over, Sandy was indulging in his usual smoke while discussing harvest operations when the tri-weekly freight was noticed to pass down the line, hardly discernible for dust from a nearby summer fallow. It seemed only a minute later that Sandy, all at once rushed to the window and as he reached it another cloud of smoke passed. In great excitement he shouted to Robert and his own man that the train must have started a fire and rushed to the door. Outside, the sight that met his gaze was enough to make the strongest heart quail with fear, as dense smoke followed by a roaring fire with tongues of flame shooting twenty feet in the air was tearing across the virgin prairie in a direct path to Robert's place, faster than a horse could run. He knew, however, his own place was safely guarded, but Robert's, in which he felt such a keen interest, had more or less been left unguarded in the rush of other work. Not realizing the danger only one furrow had been plowed the year before as guard for backfiring and even this now had a considerable coat of grass. The railroad had provided a guard but the wind was so great that it was lifting big pieces of burning grass and carrying them beyond the guard.

With a shout to Robert to get the water-barrel on the stone boat, a number of sacks and his own man to get the team, he rushed in for another team, which was hitched to a breaking plow. Then both teams dashed across the plowed field to Robert's place. Sandy's idea was to get a furrow plowed from which Robert and his man could commence backfiring. When near the house, George, who had been plowing in a field below the house, now realizing the danger, met them and was instructed to start plowing at once in the stubble in case they could not stop it before it reached the stooked grain.

Sandy had soon reached the spot where he wanted to start plowing, followed by Robert with the other team, but when the hot gusts of smoke and flying pieces of burnt grass met Robert, he felt every nerve in his body turn, as it were, to steel, so great was the mental tension he was laboring under. Realizing the powerlessness of man against the forces of nature, and the possibility that the home he felt such a pride in possessing might soon be nothing but a mound of ashes with no insurance on it and still unpaid for, he felt he wanted to offer a prayer, but his tongue seemed too paralyzed to articulate the words he wished to say. Several men and women were rushing from town but so excited and out of breath that their words of advice were drowned

by the crackling sound of the approaching flames. But, Sandy, as self-appointed leader, in tones of ringing command said, "Everyone of you fellows take a wet sack and start backfiring from this furrow, and Bill, you run ahead with this lighted torch and see to it that no fire crosses over." The command was at once followed out to the letter, but several in doing so, were almost suffocated from the dense smoke. Sandy rushed his big team of beautiful Clydes ahead in a way he had never been known to do before.

By the time the first rush of flames had reached the improvised guard, driven by the tremendous force of the wind, the backfiring had only reached from three to five yards back, but the towering tongues of flame that shot ahead seemed to reach three times as far and everyone felt their efforts would prove of no avail. But, as the last stand was reached the fighters had to run back down for a few moments and several flying pieces soon ignited the grass beyond, but they were pounded out quickly with a wet bag before they got a start. Sandy had made an angular furrow in order to deflect the fire away from the house as the first important step and this proved a great help in combatting the fire, shortening the space in which the fire was coming directly.

To keep it out of the breaking, where Robert's best wheat stood in shock, Sandy quickly plowed a furrow close to the edge of the prairie so that the grass would burn much more readily. Meanwhile, the men near the bungalow, working like trojans, had managed to keep the fire from getting close but one demon-like tongue of flame shot up scorching the horses and also Sandy's whiskers as well as one hand. The flame caused the horses to jump and pull the plow out of the ground, but unconscious of the burn on his hand Sandy quickly swerved them, again making another angular detour, for the fire had now got a good start into the field of wheat. However, the furrow George had made proved a partial barrier so that Sandy was enabled to complete his to the plowed summer fallow on his own place before the fire had again caught up with him. In those few minutes of time though, the fire had destroyed forty acres of wheat.

It was a tired and disheveled-looking bunch of men that less than an hour from the time the fire started, came back to Robert's house with faces and arms black as ebony from perspiration, smoke and dust and with holes burned in their clothing. Several women had also arrived after they felt assured the fire would not be driven into town, and assisted the men in getting their clothes

presentable. Sandy and Robert congratulated the men on the fight they had put up and Robert thanked them with a grateful heart for their valued assistance. They were in turn congratulated by the others for their work and especially the good judgment Sandy had shown in handling the situation.

Sandy and Robert, who now commenced to feel the reaction setting in, went outside for fresh air and sitting on the sheltered side of a haystack as they breathed easier, and the mental strain began to ease, they realized, from the stinging sensation in hands and arms, that they had been burned. Returning to the house for vaseline to relieve the pain, they fixed themselves up as well as possible. Finally going to a window overlooking the darkened, barren prairie, Sandy looked over the scene and turning to Robert said, "Well, that was a mighty close shave!" "It certainly was," replied Robert, "and words can never express how thankful I am to you for the quick action you took in saving the buildings," but he had barely finished speaking before Sandy had stepped outside, lighted his pipe and started for his team with a gruff word of farewell.

CHAPTER 22

"Occasions of adversity best discover how great virtue or strength each one hath, for trials do not make a man frail, but they show what he is."

—Thomas A. Kempis.

THE wind continued all afternoon so that neither Robert nor George did any further work, except to put out a few of the nearby smouldering fires that might be lifted by the wind during the night. After early supper George went to town for groceries and mail, Robert having decided to remain at home owing to the discomfort he felt from the burns on his hands. On his return George passed over Robert's mail which included his two regular papers and three letters: one large one with a small box inside and one with Mamie's handwriting on the envelope, which he had been expecting during the past three weeks. This one gave him such a thrill of pleasure that for a time the feeling of loss and pain was forgotten. Then noticing it had been registered, he felt the news must be of special importance—no doubt setting the date for the wedding! This immediately raised his enthusiasm to such a pitch that he was going to tell the news to George, who was passing through the door to finish the chores for the night. Then quickly opening the envelope he eagerly searched for the words that would mean more to him than anything else in life. But, it was as if he were not seeing properly as he noted it contained one double sheet of fine paper, only partially covered. But this was nothing compared to the shock he was still to receive on reading the few lines over a second time to make sure his eyes had not been injured by the fire, for no greater would have been his surprise if the earth had opened up and swallowed him. He read the lines a third time with such a dejected expression on his youthful face that it seemed as if a lightning bolt had struck his soul. These words penetrated his mind like daggers of fire:

"Dear Robert,

I have delayed writing this letter longer than intended because when I decided to write you, I could not seem to find words to express what I wanted to say, without

possibly hurting your feelings. This I've been loathe to do, for your friendship has meant so much to me. But the truth is, for sometime past, I have felt our love was only a childhood fancy, which time and environment have changed. I know it will be difficult for you to understand my viewpoint, for which, no doubt, my associations here have been responsible. But the more we see of life, the more difficult it seems to be to understand our own feelings, and I must confess my own seem changed since we were so happy together back home. I am, therefore, returning your ring, and asking you to forgive and forget me, should you feel wronged through the associations that made our friendship so happy.

Believe me to be as ever,
Your friend, Mamie."

Dropping the letter to the table with a feeling that he could not fathom the paradoxical statements it contained, it seemed as if some bad omen had sprung out of the past with power to destroy all plans he had made for future happiness. Picking up the larger envelope which contained a small box he found the ring he had given her securely wrapped. As he looked into its sparkling beauty, none of which he now beheld, his mind wandered back to the memory of the pleasure its selection had given him and the many words of love that had been expressed the night he had placed it on her finger; the thrill of ecstasy of that moment when he had taken her in his arms and their lips had met in a seal of fidelity. Could it now be possible that it was to mean nothing more than a beautiful dream? Oh, the irony of it all! His first impulse was to obliterate the whole thing from his mind, if it were possible, by throwing letter and ring into the stove. He would take her at her word, forget their friendship and show her it was a game that two could play. But, a deeper thought seemed to say, "That's not the Christian way," so placing the ring in the box and the letter back into the envelope, he deposited them in a small box in his trunk. Returning to his chair he then endeavored to seek consolation from scriptural passages that he felt offered comfort in such a trying hour of adversity.

One passage seemed to impress itself more clearly than all the others, "The Lord giveth, the Lord taketh away, Blessed is the Lord." But for the first time in his religious experience, doubt came into his mind. Surely such trials as these could not be called

blessed. God was a God of love, a personal God who had said, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things shall be added to you." "And I believe it," he said to himself.

Over and over again Robert digested every word that the letter contained, but the more he thought, the more he was amazed. What possible reason could have influenced her to act this way? He had been sure that her love was sincere! At last the strain was too much and going to his bed in the wee small hours, he remembered nothing more till late next morning, when George, after several calls, went into his room to ask if he considered the wind still too high to thresh, and found him lying across the bed with his clothes on.

On being awakened, Robert explained he'd been so tired he must have fallen asleep sitting on the bed. Getting up and going to the window he noted the rising sun had come up like a great flame of fire with hazy streaks shooting across the sky, the weather-man's sign of wind. So he told George to continue with the ploughing, leaving the threshing. The balm of sleep had given Robert a restored feeling, and he managed to make a good breakfast, but when he tried to anchor some of the stringers on the stacks, which the wind had lifted out of place, everything seemed to go wrong, partly owing to his unnerved condition. Had he only known Nature's laws, he would have spent the day in bed for the shock he had been under both mentally and physically had practically denuded his system of all nervous energy.

In the late afternoon, looking from his work he noticed Sandy just turning into the field and a few moments later he pulled up in front of the stook Robert was replacing. After talking of the prairie chickens his dog had flushed, Sandy again referred to the miraculous escape of the building from the fire, but Robert replied in such an inaudible voice that Sandy scarcely heard him. Realizing that something was seriously wrong, Sandy looked him straight in the face, noting his depressed look so different from his usual affable countenance. Robert, realizing Sandy's unspoken concern said, "There seem to be times in life when to smile or be happy only makes one a hypocrite and that is the way I feel to-day." Sandy tried to change the subject by asking him about the burns on his hands, but when Robert answered by remarking that afflictions of the flesh were nothing to those endured by the heart, Sandy immediately said, "From what you have just said

I'm inclined to think that the fire has not been your only trouble."

Robert hesitated, but a sudden inspiration brought the words, "Yes, it's too true, and to you, who know my plans and ambitions, I may as well speak the truth. Last night, as if the fire had not been enough for one day, the mail brought me a letter from the one who has been my inspiration for all this," pointing, as he did so, to the buildings. "The words it contained seem to make life a mockery, and the only conclusion I can arrive at is that another has come between us, which is the last thing in life I thought could be possible."

Sandy in a sympathetic tone said, "I think I understand, what you have no doubt accepted as love was probably nothing more than that predominant passion of sex-attraction. Through the false prudery underlying our educational instruction system, we are taught all the sciences of the world, but the one of how to live and understand ourselves, especially our love life. We have been given to understand that the thrills and feelings within our bodies denote love, when in reality they are nothing more than sex-attraction, and our better judgment tells us so. The day will come, though, when the old and bigoted idea that sex should be a tabooed question will be forgotten and it will be taught in the public schools with physiology, where it properly belongs."

Robert, in no mood for such philosophic talk, and whose training had been within narrow confines, hardly allowed Sandy to finish before he turned to walk away, saying, "If you think I don't know my own mind, and infer our love was nothing more than sex-attraction, I cannot say with what contempt I regard your assertion. I didn't expect that from you, my best friend, but if such is your belief, I neither want your advice nor your friendship." He stepped quickly away. Sandy, however, was instantly by his side and placing his hand gently on his shoulder, said, in vibrant tones, "Your beliefs may apply to-day but will they meet your requirements to-morrow? There was a time in my life when I would have spoken the same way, and no doubt much more dogmatically. Since then, however, experience has taught me to view carefully both sides of every question. I note you are in no mood for a logical discussion, but let me ask you, in all sincerity, before you go so far as to pass judgment on the one who has been the object of your faith and affection, to ask yourself the question I brought up. What is love? Analyze it from every viewpoint and weigh it with a business-like sense—not with biased or excited feelings of

the mind! If your conclusions are not satisfactory, and you should wish to discuss them any further with me, you know my latch-key is on the outside, and you are always welcome." Then stepping forward to the old buggy he was gone. Robert watched him intently till he passed out of the field into the road. Then feeling sorry for the way he had spoken to Sandy his best friend, he decided he would go over that very evening and make his apologies.

He started to work again but a half-hour later, his hands feeling so sore that picking up each sheaf sent a pain through them he decided he could work no longer and returned home.

A few hours later, with the day's chores completed, he picked up the papers to scan over the week's news, but try as he would, he could not help thinking of the letter and the words which Sandy had said that stood before him like a challenge. He began to analyze every act and incident since he had known Mamie, from the beginning until the last letter had been received, living over again each impulse that had apparently knit their friendship together. At the conclusion of the analysis he felt more convinced than ever there was but one answer and that, "True love." Then to make himself more assured, he critically examined his own feelings, for Sandy inferred that had he been under her environment, he might have done likewise. Every point, however, showed an exemplary life for which he felt congratulations were due him, but a flying thought brought Marjorie back to mind. This recalled an overlooked incident, but on examining that episode he felt his feeling towards her was nothing more than a friend. He assured himself that his and Mamie's lives had shown nothing but love and fidelity for each other, thus it was all the more difficult to understand what could have ever come across Mamie that she could have written this letter. He was so sure he could convince Sandy if he went over there, but a look at the clock showed him it was too late, so he went to bed.

CHAPTER 23

"What is love? Love is the greatest, grandest and most precious thing in the world. It is the manna that feeds the soul of life."

—Nota Bene.

THE next day, being the Sabbath, dawned with rays of glorious sunshine with not a breath of wind or cloud to mar the scene of peaceful tranquillity and the blue haze on the distant horizon looking like a heavenly curtain that had been drawn to reveal the glory of God in the exotic beauty and bountifulness of nature. It was truly one of those ideal days so often seen during the western harvest that makes one feel happy to be alive. Once up and breakfast over, everything, to Robert, seemed so transformed from the day before that he felt he had got up in a different world. Then he took a walk out into the garden to see if the wind had destroyed the vegetables that had progressed so well since planting. Finding they had not suffered as badly as expected he continued over to the field where the fire had entered, and again viewing the almost direct sweep it had made towards the building, he was more perplexed than ever that it had been stopped. He really believed it was alone due to the protecting power of God.

After noon dinner he walked across the fields towards Sandy's, rejoicing in the invigorating air that seemed to rise from the prairie, like an ocean perfumed with the odor of ripening grain. Nearing the house he beheld Sandy rubbing out several well-filled heads of wheat, which he stood inspecting till Robert approached him. He handed the grain to him as he said, "How is that for one hard?" His words were so congenial that Robert was at once placed at his ease as he replied, "I don't think there will be any question about it—it sure is a nice sample!" Continuing to walk towards the house, they had just about reached the door when Robert, stopping abruptly, said, "Sandy, I have just come over to apologize for the attitude I took towards your remarks yesterday. I can hardly understand how I could so far forget myself to say what I did after all you have done for me." Sandy, with a wave of the hand, answered, "that is unnecessary; I understand

human nature and know you too well to take any offense at a few words spoken under emotional stress, and remember, words are but meaningless symbols for apology. It's your life acts that count. But come, have you relieved your mind of the high tension I found it laboring under yesterday?" Robert replied with a ring of sincerity to his words denoting the assurance his ideas had given him as he said,

"Yes—if you have reference to the question you left me to decide yesterday. My answer is that love is made up of words of affection, cherished thoughts and devotion gained through companionship, which, like nuggets of pure gold, become united together, in the heart, till the weight of value seems so great that possession is the only way to happiness." As he lit up his pipe, Sandy replied, "Your words contain good judgment and the simile you use is very apt, therefore, my using it also should make my thought more clear. I would at first like to remind you that to recognize the heart as a container of feelings or sentiments is to cling to an old superstition. The heart is a vital organ of the body; it knows, or does, nothing but carry out the laws of nature in the subconscious mind. The feelings that you associate with this organ are nothing more or less than the rush of blood, caused from excitement or depression, and anything else is but false idealism. Your mind alone controls your thoughts. You have used the word 'gold' to express something of great value; I agree with you. You are also aware gold may be found in diverse places, river-beds, imbedded in rocky mountains, but it only remains there until such time as some prospector with pick or in some other more modern manner removes it. The answer you have applied to love, you will note, has strong similarity, but in place of a prospector, it is another suitor who, with subtle words or other appeal, removes the golden thoughts you say are placed in the heart, which I say is only another molecule in the brain."

Robert, who sat as if hypnotized, was at a loss to know just what to say next. Finally, in his excitement, he managed to say, "Your logic makes me dumb. Therefore, I have to ask you to define it more clearly." Sandy continued, "Yesterday when I saw you were laboring under great mental strain, I suggested that you would think of love as a two-sided proposition in order to bring you out of that spell of egotism or selfishness that we are all so prone to crawl into, but now that you are here, it may be of interest to consider the word love from various angles. Due to the mean-

ingless, absurd and false suppositions used in applying it, there appears to be no true standard for it, for love, in its truest sense, is the greatest, grandest and most precious thing in the world. It is the manna that feeds the living soul of life."

Robert here interrupted saying, "Before you go further, just what do you mean by soul? If I understand you right, you do not believe the Bible, therefore, the word 'soul' would have no special meaning for you."

"Well," said Sandy, "there is a great deal of misunderstanding about the true meaning of the word. No doubt, from your training and church affiliations, you believe it is to be that inherent something within our bodies that has never been defined or described, but which the creeds tell us is immortal. My idea is somewhat different, for to me the soul is one's body, one's life, one's entire being which, in the true sense of the word, is what the Bible teaches, for it says, 'God breathed into Adam the breath of life, and man became a living soul'—not part of him but all of him, which he had made." Here Robert broke in to say, "Then if that be true, the only conclusion to be reached is that, when the body dies and again passes into dust, the soul does also." Sandy, for a moment appeared to be stumped, but he replied, "Physically that is just what takes place. However, I am going to make use of the word 'spiritual' to which neither you nor I nor any one else can give a comprehensive meaning more than to fit one's own idea, and one man's guess is as good as another's. The idea I wish to advance I'll make clear by using the following illustration. Let us suppose you have read a book and the thoughts contained therein have become firmly fixed in your mind. The book is then destroyed. Would you still consider that it had been of any real value to you? Of course you would, that is my idea of how the book of one's life is valuable. We come into this world with a blank record. When we leave it, our life is written on it, whether it be good or bad, long or short, and from that experience the sinfulness of sin will be shown, and the great temptations our life is subject to. Our life's book will be of value to us."

As Sandy finished the explanation of his theory, Robert, who was nervously shifting in his chair, said, "This angle of thought you have given is so entirely new to any I have ever heard associated with it, that I can hardly grasp your meaning, and if so I am led to the opinion it is even more theoretical than the one I have used."

Sandy replying, said, "Nearly everything in life is theory till proven by facts. Now I'll speak of love according to my interpretation of it. The first and most important part of it is sex, an instinct or passion that has been given to life for the propagation of its species, and in many instances, especially mankind, for companionship and intellectual advantage. This is proven by the different stages of development, that all life passes through, especially humanity, as in early childhood sex remains more or less dormant, but after teen age is reached, develops quickly and in many cases remains till late in life. With the blessing of intelligence, civilization long ago should have known the difference between the passion of lust and that of love. While the truth is, how few even in our educated classes do, as proven by the folly of their actions? We may pride ourselves on the fact of our great scientific institutions of learning, where even the proper mating of swine and of poultry for the improvement of the species is taught, but with man, the idea is tabooed, owing to a supposed standard of morals handed down by ignorant forefathers, whose creeds forbade the exercise of the reasoning mind, and whose religious beliefs made it a sin for them to seek to know the secrets of sex life. But thanks to the powers that be that day is about passed, and soon our young men and women will be taught how to understand their feelings, so that the true happiness of the nuptial state will not be blinded by sex complexes, whereby the feelings of sex-attraction for the moment may overbalance those based on good judgment and the facts of sex so important to life's happiness."

"To make my meaning possibly more clear", he continued, "let me use the following illustration: A young lady of refinement, beauty and education in a distant city decided on spending the summer vacation in the country at a popular lake-resort, where she enjoyed herself with the usual recreations, the most important being dancing. At one of the dances she attended a big, ungainly, uneducated laborer, known locally as a good-for-nothing, was present. Dressed in good clothes, he presented a vigorous type of manhood with a predominance of sex indicated. She at once became conscious of intense feelings which, she was convinced, were prompted by a great love. Her reading of romantic, trashy novels added fuel to the flames and to her he was the brave cavalier bringing romance. Here he was now in flesh and blood. A few weeks later they were married. Then life's big realities had to be

faced and 'The piper had to be paid'. The big illusion was soon punctured and she could not understand why she had taken such a foolish step. But the question is, what attracted these two, who, in nearly all mutual aspects of life, were direct opposites? The answer is quite simple: ignorance and sex and the false idealism that turns so many homes into four walls where two people are sentenced for life to eke out a loveless existence, unless their better judgment invites the law to the rescue."

"What you have just described is no doubt a true picture of some lives, but do you mean to infer that there can be no such thing as happy marriages by opposites or those of different dispositions? If you do, then many marriages would never be consummated if they had to be judged by that standard."

"There are exceptions to every rule," replied Sandy, "and I am led to believe that God, in his wisdom, has implanted a certain form of electro-biology in the bodies of mankind, that under certain conditions react to direct opposites for the benefit of the human race, otherwise it would be hard to understand many such marriages that have proven both successful and happy, the children of such a union being specially gifted."

"There is another situation in which our judgment is often inconsistent due to ignorance, and that is when we condemn those who are known to our medical practitioners as oversexed, and thus in their actions fall below the moral standard we have set up. On the other hand we hold up the undersexed, who possibly have never known what real passion is, as paragons of virtue."

"Love is too often considered as such through some pleasing emotion that has been brought to the mind due to the impression made by wealth, ambition, or the thousand and one things that make their appeal to our senses. But this is no more love than a petal is a flower. Love must be based on a more certain foundation and to me the three most cardinal principles involved are: 1—magnetism, physical and mental (for the first impulse is attraction). 2—desire, and 3—good judgment, to be used in weighing the first two carefully so that they are properly balanced, as should always be done when one man and one woman plight their troth to unite in mankind's holiest estate of matrimony and to fulfill nature's laws."

"Now, I asked you to consider the question of love so that you might be more sympathetic and considerate to the one who means so much to you. I didn't want you to write hastily yesterday, and

also I am firmly convinced, you will approve of such delay in due time. If you are to learn she has not loved you wisely, it is far better to know it now than when it is too late. If, on the other hand, she wrote you on mistaken impulse, a reasonable letter from you will receive much more consideration than an angrily worded one." Robert who had been attentively following each word, was inclined to listen to this advice except the thought kept coming to his mind that the words of love she had so often expressed were now proven by her letter to be only so many lies. Then he thought of the text he had recently used in a Sabbath school lesson on forgiveness which said, "But I say unto you, not seven times seven, but seventy times seven," which prompted him to say, "All you have spoken may be quite true, but you see our love was entirely different."

Sandy then with a smile breaking over his face, as near as could be detected through his shaggy whiskers said, "If I state you are one of the many in whom voluptuousness and love of beauty increase the sex instinct, am I likely to err?" Robert now seemed rather undecided how to reply, apparently afraid his own words would act like a boomerang to his ideas so he finally shook his head.

"Then I must ask you a few questions. Have you ever stopped to consider what your feelings might be should this ideal companion of your mind lose her beauty, her health, or should scandal be attached to her name, or suffer many other handicaps that life may bring? If not let your mind visualize what change they might bring to you, then ask yourself, "Would my love persist in spite of all these?" When you have answered these questions to your own satisfaction unbiasedly, I think you will be convinced that those feelings you claim are love in the heart, are no more love than electricity is light until it is transformed with proper control. True love, like pure gold, comes only through the refining process, whereby admiration, charm, companionship, desire, trials, adversities, misunderstandings, are placed in the crucible of life till the dross is all burned away by the fire of experiences and your love is reflected from your soul, or to be more explicit your words and deeds." Robert, who was still unwilling to admit that love is built upon such idealistic plane, quickly attacked this idealism. "If what you have just said was a fact, there would practically be no love in the world to-day."

"It is one of life's most difficult problems to make ourselves

believe something we don't want to accept," replied Sandy. "Nevertheless if we seek the facts, we will discover that a great percentage of the so called love of to-day are only the seeds of hate for to-morrow; therefor, it is not love." "Admitting what you have said to be true as to the real composites of love, you also stated that sex played a most dominant part in life," said Robert, "so would this not imply that God is to blame for endowing us with a passion stronger than that of reason, for you have said such is life's standing of the great majority."

"It is through this that the world is in such a confused state to-day," Sandy replied. "Religion has given us many plans and standards as being from God, which time and experience has proven are unreliable, and simply the reasoning of the finite mind. Science is supposed to reveal to us the truth, but science can go no further than examination of matter as it is found in the world. Therefore, to me, the perplexities of mankind with no apparent reliable guidance, has but one answer, that this is an age of experience, and things beyond my understanding, I have no desire to question. My one desire is to live a contented life, and help my fellowman whenever I can. As I feel assured that the power behind all nature requires no guidance from man."

Then setting his pipe on the table nearby was evidence to Robert that the discussion was closed; he again thanked him for his logical and conclusive argument, stating he regretted not having the knowledge to enter into it more fully, but appreciated very much the information he had been given. "But there is one question more I must ask to satisfy my curiosity—how does it come about that a bachelor recluse such as I have always thought you to be, could have given so much thought and study to a question that I would have considered as foreign to you as the poles?" After a considerable pause and deep set expression to his eyes, as if he was visualizing the past Sandy replied, "What you have asked would entail telling a long story which only once before I have ever told, but if you think it would be of interest, under the circumstances I will tell you. But, before doing so, let us have supper first. "You get the fire going, and I shall go for a pail of water." So without further question these conditions were proceeded with.

CHAPTER 24

"The man who fits himself physically and mentally with a well-balanced idealism is like the thoughtful traveler who carries a flashlight for emergency."—Nota Bene.

IT WAS some hours later, with supper over, when Sandy, his pipe going nicely, commenced the following story:

"What I am about to tell you may appear as strange to you as its truth is to me. I will have to condense it considerably for it goes back to my childhood days on a farm near a little village in Scotland, about thirty miles from Edinburgh, where my two brothers, Allen and James, and I were born. My parents were in very comfortable circumstances so that school filled most of my early life. Mother always reminded us that we must get an education, and father, being a strict, old-time Presbyterian, made sure we were each Sunday in our rightful places at the little kirk in the village, one and a half miles distant, where some of the long prayers made by the old minister with such precision and form, still remain in my memory, though possibly not so much revered now! At the age of nineteen I had passed through all the grades of the local and grammar schools and a few days after I had finished, I overheard my father and mother discussing our future. She had always had her mind set on one of the boys being in the ministry. James, who was two years older had always been more interested in the farm than either my younger brother or myself. From what I overheard, it was apparently decided that I should be the one to enter the ministry. A few weeks later, I was told by my father that when the university opened after the holiday, he had decided that I should be given the opportunity to enter the ministry. He trusted the honor of the family would be upheld by the conscientious service I would give in the work of God. Although not at the time very enthusiastic about it, I regarded father's wish as law, and rebellion against it was unheard of.

"Two weeks later my father took me to Edinburgh and made all arrangements for a full course. I did not know, at the time why he had gone with me but found out later that, believing I had a

leaning toward the pleasures of life, he had left instructions with my teacher that I be given plenty of work to take up my spare time. That was one thing, as I look back, that I'll always feel that teacher did to the letter, for during the first two years it was impossible for me to keep caught up with my work, and noting the time my other classmates had to themselves, I wondered why I was obliged to take up so much ancient history and classical literature that they passed over. As the answer given my question about it was unsatisfactory to me I gradually discontinued it. Now, though, I often get pleasure from the knowledge I derived from it.

"The years passed quickly and with the passing of each year, I became more inspired with the ideal of what was to me my life's work, in teaching the great truths of the Bible. My vacations were always spent in working on the farm, while my parents carefully impressed on me the great importance of my calling and the pride they felt in having a son in such an honored profession. Nevertheless, being young, I took a prominent part in a great many of the social events at college, unknown to them, for, being fairly popular, I was generally given some important part on every committee.

"Usually, I managed to pass my examinations with honors, which added to my standing at home, for generally, when mother sent me her congratulations she included a pound note and a box of shortbread. These were two things that always received a welcome reception, especially the money, as my father had the idea it was foolishness for boys to have money to spend, and during the last year, like many others, I had begun to single out one girl with whom to go out. I was madly in love with Jean McIntosh, only daughter of a wealthy woollen manufacturer, who had been given every advantage in education and travel, thus broadening her viewpoint of life. With Grecian features, deep blue eyes, golden brown hair and a charming personality, she was most attractive to me. The last six months at the University, with so many golden hours spent in her company, seemed to fly by, carrying me as it were, on waves of exotic ecstasy. But soon, like a dream it was passed. I found myself at home again, trying to realize what it was that had so transformed this world into a paradise. A careful analysis showed me it was love, such as I had never known before.

"I was soon to learn that long hours of study and longer hours of pleasure sap away the strength for two days after my

arrival home I became very ill. The family doctor at once diagnosed my case as a nervous breakdown, caused by overstudy, ordering special care for me for the next few weeks that I might regain my strength and weight, as during the past nine months I found I had lost fifteen pounds. When I now look back it seems that fate plays a part in our lives for two weeks later a cousin, then an officer in one of our famous regiments came to spend part of his leave of absence at our home. He had only been with us a few days when, on considering my condition, he said that he believed there was no way I could regain my health quicker than by putting a term in the Service.

"With my parents agreeing, and being somewhat improved in health from the rest and regular hours, I decided to take the plunge and was soon to be made a member of his famous regiment. Could I have foreseen the future I would not have improved that way! As expected, with the exercise, physical drills and regular hours with good food and sleep during the next four months I not only put on the fifteen pounds but another five, then weighing one hundred and eighty pounds, made up of muscle and bone. I thoroughly enjoyed the work, the only drawback being the shortness of the leaves granted. These were mostly spent with Jean with a short time at home. The year passed quickly and I decided to finish the regulation term of two years, as by the end of it Jean would have finished her course. I would take my chance on getting out, owing to my ministerial standing during this second year, then be married and commence my life work, for on my last visit I had placed on Jean's finger that insignia that, before the eyes of the world, made her mine.

"However, for me, 'Anticipation proved to be greater than realization' for before another six months had passed, the War-god had again thrown down the gauntlet that forced our country into war with those peace-loving farmers, the Boers of South Africa. Our government having no other resort, at once called all the leading regiments to the Colors, including our own, no doubt owing to the fact that throughout the pages of British History it had always played an important part. A two days' leave was all that was allowed us, and owing to the strain on us all, I was pleased it was not longer. My mother was unable to forgive herself for consenting to my military career, feeling that this was a punishment sent by God for not responding to His call regarding me. Jean, of course, was terribly upset. Time was to prove I was kiss-

ing her good-bye forever when the last farewell was taken at the train which was to speed me away to a life as foreign to my childhood environment as it would be possible to conceive.

"The next day we were informed our regiment was one of the units selected for the big drive to be made from Capetown to Pretoria under the able leadership of General Buller, and a few weeks later, after a long sea-trip, most notable for the attacks of sea-sickness of which most of us suffered, we arrived at the foot of Table Mountain. After a short delay, we were threading our way around its base to the barren-looking lands beyond, on a march of victory to which the most of us had looked forward as a great excursion. Many surprises at the hand of the wily foe were to be received by us, though, in which we proved how unprepared and unacquainted with the difficulties of the country our leaders were. From the beginning, we learned how stubborn a foe we had to combat; although but farmers, they showed generalship and courage equal to most disciplined soldiers.

After two keenly contested fights, which gave us some idea of the enemy's courage and preparedness, we reached the Modder River, where the railway bridge had been destroyed, so in order to make a crossing our engineers purposed making a pontoon bridge at a selected spot. They didn't know it was overlooked by a series of hills which General Cronje and his band of patriots had selected for defence. When the bridge was ready our regiment with the Fusiliers was sent some distance further down to make a crossing by means of rope, in order to make a flank attack if found necessary, when operations were commenced. The time was early morning and everything seemed in our favour till the engineers had the rope arranged and our men commenced crossing the river which at this time was considerably swollen from recent rains, causing a strong current. With the suddenness and fierceness that characterizes a South African hail-storm, we were met with rifle bullets and high-powered maxims that dropped our men hanging from the rope like autumn leaves. Many bodies floated away in the eddying currents, others dropped in the water and swam back. The captain leading our party was shot the moment he reached the opposite shore two others and myself were the only ones to reach it alive.

"We took shelter behind a large rock, awaiting for time when that terrific avalanche of lead would cease and our comrades would be able to join us in carrying out the attack. But, after what seemed

hours of this terrible din to which had been added the larger guns and rifles of the main army, we noted our comrades, that were left back on the other shore, had been recalled, and were retiring to the main camp, which we could see was also being removed some distance back to be safe from high-powered guns with which the enemy had surprised us. As we watched the retreat with that sting that comes more from hurt pride than personal injury, we decided to remove such clothing as would impede our progress, make a dash for the river and swim under water as far as possible in our endeavor to get back at a point which was partly protected by a high bank. But, just as we turned from the big boulder that had saved us from the withering fire, to make a run to the bank, we were confronted with four burly-looking Boers on horseback with guns at the ready, as the command to halt was given in broken English.

We at once realized our helplessness and knew we had been captured. Seeing we could offer no defence, the leader again spoke in a tone that seemed more kindly, at the same time pointing to our clothes, which we knew meant to put them on again, although we did not understand his broken English. When we had again completed dressing, and turned over everything we had, except our water-bottles (one of the others and myself having saved our guns) the leader led the way, while the other three fell in behind us, and we were marched away. Never before had I felt so desolate and forlorn! Passing through a rough roadway in the hills, we saw how thoroughly honeycombed they had been made with rifle pits and large guns covering many miles in every direction, it being a veritable Gibraltar, impregnable except against the heaviest guns.

"Sometime in the afternoon of the first day, we arrived at a small town that seemed to have been built mostly of tin, with a name ending in "fontein" but which I remember best as "Hungry Fontain" as with but a light breakfast that morning, the excitement and long walk, I never remember welcoming food more. At that it was only coarse bread and meat and something else that represented a pudding. Our escort was changed here and we were allowed to ride in the heavy wagons that were going to the next town to bring supplies back. One of the new escorts was able to converse fairly well in English, having an English mother. His sympathy being entirely with the Boers he gave us a very good idea of their grievances, convincing me that it is man's selfish-

ness that so often finds its way into governments, causing war and wanton bloodshed. The few hours spent in the company of those guards I have often looked to with a longing for more of such platonic friendship, wherein we each expressed our viewpoint so satisfactorily to each other's edification."

"But those in charge of the military prison called Blonlaager, where we ended up, had calloused hearts and rhinoceros brains, for from the moment we were placed there, they looked on us as personal enemies, their greatest pleasure was taken in being as uncivil as they could be to us. Here our names and regiment numbers were taken with numerous other details and we were given the privilege of writing letters which, we were told would be delivered to our friends in due time. Actually, we discovered, they were never sent, and for more than a year that we were kept captives at this place, our government was not informed, believing us to be among the slain at the battle of Modder River."

"Some fourteen months later, we were taken to a place near Pretoria, where much better treatment was given us, also the privilege of buying extras for which prohibitive prices were charged. But, having no money, I enjoyed only this luxury through the kindness of two of my associates. I could never understand why I had not received any letters or information of any kind of my friends, not learning of the deception about our letters till later. The idea of making a break for liberty often appealed to me, but two of my mates, who had been volunteers from Natal, strongly advised against it, explaining the vast handicaps to be overcome in that difficult country. Recapture was almost certain, they warned."

"The glorious news, 'The war is over,' I shall never forget! I wanted to offer my thanks to God before I would even join in the choruses of cheering that rent the air from the different spots in camp in which my fellowmen were being held. The war over meant peace, British fair play and home, the most desired object of every prisoner. To me, it meant Jean! A few days later, after the usual red-tape, we were taken to Pretoria, and met by several of our own officers, who escorted us to Capetown. Here we spent a couple of days in re-adjusting ourselves and giving and receiving explanations as to all that had taken place since that fatal morning. I learnt that the war-office had fully confirmed my death on the report of the officer in command, who had felt confident he had

seen me shot from the rope and lost in the muddy depths of the river.

"After an enthusiastic send-off by the citizens of Capetown, we again found ourselves on a boat homeward bound, but with this difference. Instead of being jubilant we were sad as we recalled the many that were missing when the roll-call was made and we thought of the disappointed parents and sweethearts of the dead, too. After many such days there was great excitement when England was sighted and we steamed up the Mersey to dock at Liverpool, our point of debarkation. Giving us a long leave after the trying years of service, we were paid off, and I received my check the first day for full back pay. I should mention that, although particulars of my imprisonment had been cabled from South Africa, they had not been published through some oversight.

"I caught the first train for Edinburgh, being dressed in a new suit of civilian clothes, as my uniform and kit had gone to headquarters. At last the old familiar hills came into view; the picturesque countryside and villages I knew so well, then Edinburgh. I was filled with emotion, conscious only of the fact that I was home again. I stepped from the car into the surging crowd that had gathered to meet this train carrying those soldiers who had gone from this district. On my way into the station, a kind of paralysis seemed to come over me, as I was about to enter the main passageway and I have often wondered since whether it was a subconscious foreboding of what was so soon to take place.

"Proceeding through the crowded waiting-room door it was difficult to recognize anyone, but that suited me as my one desire was to meet Jean and hear her voice again. However, on approaching the door to the street, I thought I heard a familiar voice call, "David." The next moment I was caught by the shoulders and turned round twice as if the one who held me could not be sure he hadn't grasped a phantom. With a most surprised look on his face, the man said, "My God, can it be possible it is you, David, after all we have heard told about you?" But as our hands met in that grip of friendship we had always felt for each other, words were not required for assurance, for the speaker was my old college pal and friend, John McDougal. Hailing a cab, it was only a few minutes before we were comfortably seated in his commodious apartment. He had become a successful lawyer. A tasty dinner was at once ordered and served, and then he asked me to

tell him all my experiences since I had bid him farewell on my my last leave. Sitting as though spellbound during my recital of events, I thought I noticed, several times, a look of sadness take the place of interest in his eyes especially when I mentioned my letters and that I had never received any replies.

"As I finished, he again warmly grasped my hand as he said, 'David, cruel is the hand of fate.' I immediately begged him to tell me all the news of home, especially as it concerned Jean and my people, but still he hesitated until I felt I could wait no longer and was reaching for the 'phone to order a cab when he stopped me saying he had to have a heart to heart talk with me before I left. His serious mien told me more than his words as he said, 'David, from what you have just told me, I know you have faced many serious trials, including death, and what you have just asked is the most difficult thing I have ever been called upon to do, for I have to cause you more suffering and pain. So I hope that the courage with which you stood other trials will again abide in your soul, for, David, your mother is dead! The shock she sustained in the news that you were among the slain at Modder River caused such a terrible strain on her weak heart, that two weeks after the sad news, she died. With her dying breath she spoke of her love for and pride in you, and her sorrow that fate had so dealt with you. Your brother, James, was married about a year ago, and your father still lives with them on the farm, while your other brother is still in London.'

"He then went on to tell me of my college chums, but as I again grasped his hand, a feeling of weakness I had never known before came over me as I asked news of Jean. Instead of telling me he used every argument possible to prove how upset my nerves already were and begged me to go to bed and he would tell me all the next day. But, somehow, I sensed what he had to say was not good news, and I was determined that I must know all now, as sleep would be impossible anyhow. So, bringing his chair alongside of mine, as if he couldn't bear to see my sorrow he said, 'Trouble, David, never comes alone. Jean, like your mother, received such a shock from the news that she suffered a nervous breakdown immediately and for the next year her father had the best medical advice upon her case; she was taken to the South of France, but gradually continued to grow worse. The thought that preyed on her mind most was that had she not insisted on getting that special degree, you would have married her then and entered

upon your life's work in the ministry where she had pictured so much pleasure and happiness for you both—you would not have stayed in the army. Believing you had gone, life held no further interest for her. Only three months ago she passed away implicitly believing she would meet you." I barely heard the last few words for, suddenly, something seemed to snap in my brain, flooding venom and poison through my entire being, as I tried to comprehend how it could be possible that a God of love could bring such trials and afflictions upon a human being, whose aim and ambition in life had been to serve Him."

"I have no clear recollection of what took place after. I remember John asked me to spend the night with him, but with the excuse that I must see Jean's parents, I was up and gone. Once outside, all my pent-up emotions seemed to turn into one consuming hatred as I considered that here were the wages of patriotism and religion. No, I would deny service to these ideals from then on, and to myself I swore that vow. I then entered a cheap pub and started on the downward path by taking the first drink, a path that was to lead down to the lowest degradation. I then walked the streets for many hours, my brain becoming incensed with the poison of liquor. I must have wandered into another pub and gone to sleep as it was not until ten o'clock the next night that I was awakened by some other drunks coming into the bar. I could hardly realize what had taken place. For a long time my mind seemed a blank, but after copious draughts of water, and a short time later, a good meal, I felt some better. My reasoning faculties began to work again, but only to bring back all the tortures that a man's memory is capable of inflicting upon him, like unto the torture of the damned."

"That experience has always tempered my judgment and made me more sympathetic to those in trouble, or who have committed crime or grievous offense under what can be truthfully said was temporary insanity. But, to resume—a short time later, I was speeding towards London with no other plans than to keep my mind floating in alcohol; feeling it offered the only surcease from my troubles. Arriving there, I at once became a habitue of the east side dives for the reason there you could find more understanding sympathy than anywhere else, as I continued to sink lower and lower under the maelstrom of its environments. Then, thinking I might perchance meet my brother, I decided I would go to Paris where I frequented the Apache dens, living that kind

of life, but staying inside the law. My only desire being to try and forget. From there I drifted to Marseilles, shipping out as a stoker on a tramp steamer which called at a number of ports. I finally landed at Constantinople."

"For the next year the wanderlust held me as I roamed the seas, spent my last dollar with the denizens of the underworld in their haunts of vice such as abound in the world's great sea-ports. I soon was well acquainted with red shambles of Port Said, the hellholes of Shanghai and many other iniquitous spots. During all this time I labored under the delusive idea of every sinner that he can run away from himself. But finally to realize when wanderlust has spent itself and health and wealth gone, and all you have salvaged is painful experience, and that the only things in the world that offer a refuge against its temptations and adversities are work, love, or deep religious conviction, which gives a peace of mind that makes every thing else seem but worthless dross."

"At last, landing in the beautiful Hawaiian islands, in rags and reduced to a beachcomber because of personal pride. I had but one five pound note left. It was sewn in my shirt and for some unknown reason I hung on to it, even when I craved a bottle and forgetfulness. There I met a Joe Simpson, another son of misfortune, who had been a soldier in the Indian service, being finally drummed out through drink. It was during a mutual recital of our experiences that described us both as prodigals that Simpson connecting it with the Bible story, immediately caught me by the hand saying, 'Yes, we too have gone the limit, let us now return unto our Father'." His very expression told me he meant just what he said, but I doubted if the flesh was strong enough!"

"We sat silent for a few moments, thoughts and emotions flooding through, until finally we sealed our pact to see it through, with a handshake, while the glorious south sea sun cast our shadows on the white sand, and a Te Deum of praise, it seemed, burst from the silver-throated songsters of the air, as the blue Pacific lapped at our feet. This scene has always remained in my mind—one of the great beacons on the road of life!

"Two weeks later we were on a large ocean liner bound for Vancouver, working as deck-hands for our passage but enjoying and appreciating the opportunity. We had both heard many stories of this great new land, Canada, and felt that there we would both get a new break. After a very pleasant trip, our boat docked at Vancouver. Having only dirty overalls, I was obliged to break my

five-pound note to buy two second-hand suits to give us some semblance of respectability. They cost sixteen dollars and fifty cents all told, but the day after our arrival, we found jobs with a big contractor at wages which to me seemed a small fortune. By the time we'd worked there three months, the newspapers were carrying glowing reports of the great crops in the prairies, and becoming enthused with the idea of seeing them, we quit work and a week later were in Regina. Here we soon found work in the great harvest fields and although we were butt of a good many practical jokes that went with the training, which we took in good spirit, we soon found we had made several warm friends and had absorbed the western spirit that seems to be in the air of the wide open spaces and makes a man love the country. When the harvest was over, we at once filed for homesteads, the one I filed for is, I am proud to say, still my home.

"This now brings me to the end of my story, except to add that Joe, after spending three years here, went into farming on a larger scale in Alberta and I purchased his homestead. The year following, I made a trip home to the old land, where I found my brothers pursuing the occupations they had both chosen, my father still living with my brother on the farm. Of course, after I had once settled here, I had written home explaining part of the emotional nightmare I'd gone through before I found myself. My greatest task though was explaining to my friend John how I had so completely and quickly dropped out of sight. After I had left him, he said something in my eyes had told him I was not going directly to Jean's parents, so he had set up a search, but had never found any information that would give him the slightest clue. Time, the great healer of all wounds, has done much for me, mostly by changing my ideals about life, and these changed ideals have made me to be considered queer by those who don't know me."

With these words he concluded that important phase of his life's history, which had so clearly revealed some of those deep traits of character hidden behind the grim exterior of his shaggy beard, like pure gold covered by layers of grey granite.

It was several minutes before Robert came out of his apparent coma, but then he stepped quickly from his chair and grasping Sandy by the hand said in all sincerity, "Your story has given me a new viewpoint on life and a broader and greater understanding of friendship than I have ever known before. I give you my word

that I hope to never again, if angry, forget to act as a gentleman."

"If youth could only learn to stop, look and listen when it faces new experiences and problems, what a multitude of trials, misfortunes and heartaches it could avoid," Sandy commented. "And to you, Robert, I say, no matter how great your trials or afflictions may be, take time to think them over and then again view them from both sides."

"This brings to my mind a story, that I think is worth repeating; John MacPhail had a breachy bull and a couple of cows, that kept breaking into his neighbour Andy Dugal's crop and pasture; which was cause for several remonstrances, John claiming it was his poor fence; till finally, Andy sent him a lawyer's letter for damages. John being a canny Scot then went to another lawyer, but in place of telling his own story, he told Andy's to which the lawyer replied; Dinna a doubt John you have a clear case; John then with a saddened look, said, that's Dugal's story I told you, I will go and settle, thanks for your trouble."

At these words, Robert, noting that it was near nine o'clock thanked Sandy again for his kindness and was on his way home. His little bungalow soon came into view looking as silent as a tomb in the silver light, and he longed for the sign of a light in the window which would indicate that a loved one—yes, Mamie!—was waiting for him. But, true to the advice he had received from Sandy, he composed his mind into a state of tolerance and charity before sitting down to write Mamie a letter in reply to hers. Then, with a silent prayer he sealed it, praying that God's blessing would rest on its message and that he would again know that beautiful and perfect harmony of love they had shared in the past. He had written:

My dearest Mamie:

Could the brightest star in the heavens have fallen before my admiring gaze and I had found it to contain nothing but cold iron, no greater could have been my surprise when I opened your letter and read those unbelievable words whose meaning, if true, must place between us a gulf which my understanding will never be able to fathom. I have always led myself to believe I knew every impulse of your nature. Can it be possible I have been deceived? Your love I have trusted and treasured as life's most precious jewel. Has it now to be tossed aside with the same indifference that a pebble on a

seashore is tossed into the briny depths? You speak of it as a childhood fancy, but I feel assured this is mistaken judgment, possibly caused through your present environment, but in all sincerity, I ask you to study well the emotions of life that prompt love. Then, if I do not hold that sacred place in your affection, you hold for another to bring you happiness, I am willing to say *au revoir*. Hope, however, is life's brightest beacon. Should it be your desire I will not expect a reply to this letter.

Believe me to be as ever

Faithfully yours,

Robert.

Three days later, could Robert have pulled back the curtains of space and viewed the scene, when his letter had been received, by this seemingly carefree girl, on whom college and city life apparently was making such a change from the Mamie he knew eight months ago, he would have gathered her up in his strong arms to save her from herself, before the gradually tightening tentacles of luxury, pride and vanity—these subtle snares of innocence—had broken down unknowingly her every power of resistance. Rushing in from classes she quickly opened the letter from Robert, expecting her vanity would be further fed by sweetly-worded requests from him for her love and favor. But, a look of disappointment appeared on her face as she read and re-read it in her endeavor to get the meaning behind the words so decisively expressed therein. The phrases "to study well the emotions that prompt love" and "hope is life's brightest beacon" seemed to penetrate her mind like a two-edged sword, but then, as though to throw off the idea with a flippant poise, she said, "What is he driving at anyhow; love is love and that is all there is to that."

With a feeling of indifference she cast the letter to one side. No sooner had she done so than she picked it up again, and as she re-read it word for word, and realized the depth of sentiment it contained, she threw herself on the bed, crying as though her heart was broken, as she exclaimed, "What have I done? what have I done?" She remembered the pleasure his letters had always given her and that she had accepted his ring and pledged herself to him. What possibly could have come over her that would make her do such a thing? Did he not mean more than life to her? She would write at once and ask a thousand pardons of him for her cruel action. The dinner gong sounded but she shouted her excuses

and lay down on the bed to reflect, carefully tucking the letter into the neck of her dress. A short time later, the power of sleep had brought peace to her troubled mind.

She was in this condition when two hours later two of her chums came to get her to make up a party at which dancing would be the main attraction. Thinking she had but overslept herself they quickly set her up in bed as they helped her dress, at the same time shouting, "You are late, the boys will be here any minute." And in spite of her protests they insisted on her going with them. Before her dressing was completed, the boys arrived, so that in the mad rush to get away, Robert and the resolutions she had so firmly decided on were forgotten, as if Fate wanted to further banish the memory. When she had undressed for her bath the letter had fallen in unnoticed and was nothing but a mass of wet pulp when again seen. Once again, immersed in festivities and the whirl of social events, everything else was forgotten, for the flattery of Gordon Beldmor completely overwhelmed her. That evening passed, then days and soon weeks, many times during which she promised herself she would write Robert "tomorrow sure", but procrastination, the thief of time, once more won the victory. True is the maxim that reads, "It is good intentions that pave the way to hell!"

CHAPTER 25

"Words of repentance are like raindrops from a shower; they may wash away spots or remove wicked thoughts, but it requires the sunshine and changed life as proof of its sincerity."

—Nota Bene.

THE bright sunny days of September and October in the Canadian West act like a magic wand over the golden wheat fields, as day by day they are stripped of the countless sheaves by the threshers who leave only great heaps of straw to dot the landscape, like monuments to mark the end of another season. After eight weeks of this arduous work with one of the big steam outfits Robert and George finished the season's run, so once again Robert returned to the store. It was busier than ever now due to the extra business good crops bring. To those who knew him best, Robert was slightly changed now for the sadness and disappointment of his love affair had left their mark. He had never received an answer to his letter and hope had faded, but with the exception of Sandy, his secret remained buried in his heart. The only outward sign, if such could be taken, was the freer manner in which he associated with other girls in acting as escort from choir practices and other meetings.

Soon the season of long evenings, the time for social activities was on them and a new arrangement among the businessmen to close every night at six o'clock during the winter months was one of special interest to the young people, as it gave them more leisure for sports and dancing.

Of course, it deprived the older men of the forum they had dominated many years for their varied discussions, but the West being a land of progress, they were to learn they had their day and that "round-the-stove" chats in the future would have to be conducted in the poolroom or hotel sitting room. Robert, feeling that this was a real chance for educational reading, at once ordered a set of well-known classics for consumption, but before another week had passed, unforeseen circumstances were to considerably change his plans and ideas for the future.

About this time, Elizabeth Ann Dixon, a sister of Mrs. Hartmor, the banker's wife, and conceded to be the society leader of Badgerton, arrived from Ontario to make her sister an extended visit. As her sister had not been advised as to the time of her arrival, no one was at the train to meet her, with the result that Billy, the mailman, was her only escort and baggage-carrier on the trip over to her sister's home.

When the door was opened by her sister, in response to Elizabeth Ann's knock, Mrs. Hartmor expressed her surprise and delight as she exclaimed, "Oh, if it's not Betty!" This brought Mr. Hartmor forward with a rush and in the excitement of the greetings, which included several fond embraces and kisses, Billy stood fascinated, regretting that he wasn't a relative too. Then, noticed by Mrs. Hartmor, who was commencing to express her thanks, Billy broke in, "It was a pleasure, Mrs. Hartmor," but as Mr. Hartmor took them, he passed him a quarter.

No sooner had Billy handed over the grips than he was on the run to the barber-shop to tell the big news, for when a new, especially a good looking, girl came to town, where there were ten boys for every girl, it was a cause for great rejoicing, and the news was broadcast as if by the magic of tribal signal drums. The big question was who would make her acquaintance and find her favor first? Billy's animated description of her beauty was so glowing that everyone present felt a special interest in the new arrival. Every male customer for miles round found it necessary to go to the bank the next day, and at first Mr. Hartmor was unable to understand the reason till someone gave the joke away. The male populace's curiosity remained unsatisfied for three days, until the sisters decided to venture out in the wintry weather for groceries and mail. The cold and frost soon placed their western trade-mark on Betty's cheeks, and they glowed with the color of a deep-tinted rose, enhancing the beauty of her clear white skin, as she and her sister passed down the main street.

When they entered the store, they were met by Miss Raymore, who Mrs. Hartmor introduced to Betty. Robert, at the far end of the store, looked up as the bell tinkled, but when he saw who had entered he decided to go out to the warehouse. Knocking over a box in his hurry, he was discovered by Mrs. Hartmor, who said, "Mr. Benson, I want you to meet my sister Elizabeth Ann—Betty, we call her—of whom you have heard me speak. She gave us such a pleasant surprise the other night!"

Robert had hoped to appear his best when he met Mrs. Hartmor's sister, but here he was now with syrupy hands, dirty overalls and a three-days' growth of beard, making him appear at his worst! Deciding that valor was the better part of discretion, he came forward and said, with a polite bow, "I am afraid, Mrs. Hartmor, the time for this pleasure is very inopportune." But the charming smile displayed by Betty, with her large dreamy, but innocent eyes, put him at his ease. After welcoming her to the town and indulging in some light conversation, during which Betty twinkled and beamed at him, thereby causing a temporary weakness of his knees, Robert excused himself to go and look after the molasses. The ladies gathered their parcels and then left the store, but no sooner had the door closed than Robert hurried to the window watching every step Betty took, with the greatest admiration. Miss Raymore, however, who had been observing him said, in her jocular way, "Never mind, old dear, it will wear off." Robert wondered if she referred to the molasses on his hands. If she did, she was right, but if she referred to admiration of Betty, well—he was not so sure!

As he finished up an order, he thought of this new interest in the light of Sandy's pointed remarks about love, but he was unable to believe that this new impulse mastering his mind, that had come in a minute, could possibly be such. His feelings were so different from those he had held towards Mamie, for Betty appeared to his eyes more like a beautiful flower, her lips resembling a dew-kissed rose, when its petals opened towards the morning sun, her dreamy eyes the modesty and innocence of the twinkling star that magnetized one's gaze, while the graceful curves of her body made up a form that seemed divine. Then, imagining himself as the caretaker in a garden where such a flower could remain, it would make the most barren spot in the world a Heaven. Robert day-dreamed for the balance of his work-day and at supper the conversation with George was so cheerful that he figured the "bulls" must have run away with the wheat market, as he knew Robert had not sold yet. Before sleeping that night, Robert decided he must cultivate Betty's acquaintance!

It was soon learned that Betty was a musician and singer, so the Ladies' Aid of the church quickly installed her as choir leader and organist, which not only helped Robert's cause, but also ensured full male attendance at choir practices. Robert bided his time both in the store and at choir practices, his greetings always

being most cordial, but carrying an assumed air of indifference. The observant eye would have seen an interest that love can never hide, though. It was doubtful if it was ever noted by Betty for her disposition was so dignified and modest. The boys actually felt that she was a conundrum, which they could not solve.

When it was rumoured around that Betty was engaged and due to be married in a year's time, Robert's heart sank down to his boots, but hope was revived when, at his request, he was awarded the honour of taking her to the party her sister was holding in her honour at the local hall.

It was a great surprise to all present when Robert arrived with Betty at the party for it had always been the general opinion that he had a girl somewhere, though never admitting it. Following a brief session of cards, dancing became the order of the evening, the three-piece orchestra opening up with a dreamy waltz, which quickly brought everyone to their feet. All eyes looked towards Betty as she came on the floor with Robert, for having now taken off a long coat, draped over her shoulders during the cards, she displayed a most becoming gown of sheer blue silk that seemed to further set off her beauty. It was not surprising, therefore, that Robert's arm tightened around her waist, as they turned around and in and out to the bewitching strains of music, but he found it necessary several times to relax his hold for fear his actions would betray his inward feeling. Looking into her eyes, however, he felt assured that the pressure was regarded as an electrifying influence kindling kindred emotions in her heart, too.

Owing to the many requests and as the guest of honor she was not able to dance with Robert again till the supper dance, a minuet, but as she gracefully took the steps to the exquisite music, Betty's thoughts were soon in dreamland, picturing how beautiful life would be stepping along a pathway with the one by her side, who, to her, was a real Adonis. After a dainty lunch had been served, dancing was resumed till the wee sma' hours, when, finally, the orchestra had the courage to announce the playing of "Home Sweet Home." No sooner had its sombre but comforting strains commenced than Robert and Betty were again on the floor and as they circled the room Betty said, looking tenderly into Robert's eyes, "I have never before so enjoyed a dance as this one to-night.- Somehow the tune seems out of place, though, as home is not always like this." "That is a strange coincidence," Robert smiled, "for I was just thinking myself how many couples, in such a charming set-

ting as this, the tune has started on their way to 'Home Sweet Home'."

A few minutes later they stood before the Hartmor's suite-door, Robert ready to take his leave, when Mrs. Hartmor arrived from the hall and asked Robert in for a cup of coffee. Shortly after it had been served, Mr. and Mrs. Hartmor made their excuse to retire and it seemed to Robert almost too good to be true that he had been presented with an opportunity to tell Betty of the love that was springing up in his heart for her. However, he decided the time was not yet ripe and as he thanked her for his enjoyment of the evening, she smiled coyly but sincerely as she said, "I am sure, Mr. Benson, the pleasure has been mutual, for you made my evening very enjoyable, too." This statement made his cup of joy overflow and taking her hand which he held without the usual formal shake, for what seemed minutes, he said goodnight in such a spirit of buoyancy, that she was conscious of a magnetic thrill.

CHAPTER 26

*"To make a happy fireside climb
to weans and wife,
That's the true pathos and sublime,
Of human life."*

—Robert Burns.

IN THE days that followed Robert and Betty were frequently seen together, particularly after choir practices, and it was generally conceded that each carried a "no trespass" sign. The other boys, feeling they had had their chance, had no grudge against Robert, but a few of the girls were known to criticise her clothes and even her music-playing. However, as her character and disposition were faultless, she was soon accepted, and looked upon as a leader at most functions.

With the pre-Christmas busy season now on, Robert worked at the store early and late, but he always managed to find time for a daily call at the Hartmor's. In their close association, Robert and Betty soon discovered so many likeable traits in each other's characters that the ardor of their affection for each other increased daily, although Robert noticed how quiet in disposition Betty was, seemingly capable of hiding her real feelings.

Especially did he note this difference a few evenings before Christmas, when he called to spend the evening and deliver the gifts he had purchased for her, as well as for Mr. and Mrs. Hartmor, who had arranged to leave the following day to spend Christmas at his brother's some hundred miles east. When Mr. and Mrs. Hartmor retired to pack for the trip, Robert and Betty were left to themselves seated on the davenport, where she again admired his gift of a beautiful wrist-watch, showing further appreciation in studying the engraving on it. As she did so, her arm naturally came near him and before he knew it he closed his arms about her, kissing her passionately. Although she made no offer of resistance or indicated his endearments were untoward, Robert, who had known the passionate embraces of Mamie still felt he must have gone too far and was about to apologize, when she looked into his face and smiled invitingly as she patted his arm.

Thus encouraged in his own convictions he again took this liberty, till at last, lingering longer than before said, "Betty, I love you more than anything else in the world. Will you be my wife?" She made no movement, but looking into his eyes, said, "You don't mean that, Robert, you know you've hardly known me two months." Holding her closer yet, he replied, "Betty, that's just what I mean and what I want," to which she then replied, "Well, I will accept you, for I can now make a confession—I have loved you from the day I first saw you with the dirty face and molasses!" Thus lost, in a world of new happiness, they indulged in many fond embraces, whispering endearments, until Robert realized he must leave if his beloved was to get enough sleep to stand to-morrow's journey. So with a farewell parting and promise to see her off in the morning, he was gone, his heart bubbling over with joy.

The following morning he was at the store, after seeing Betty and the Hartmors away, when Sandy came in for his supplies. Asking Robert where he was spending Christmas, and unaware that the Hartmors had left town, he was pleasantly surprised when his friend said half-seriously, "I was thinking your place would suit me as well as any." "Delighted," Sandy replied, "There is no place you will be more welcome, and I have a half dozen prairie chickens all ready for the event, plum pudding, Haggis, and short-bread sent by my brother's wife in the Old Country. You have only to say the word, as Mrs. Martin sent me over an invitation yesterday to spend it with them, which I'll turn down and we'll spend it at my place." Robert at once agreed, stipulating only that he would have to leave early to go to the Adams' party in the evening as promised.

On Christmas morning, with a cold, keen wind and walking heavy due to the drifts of powdered snow, it was eleven thirty before Robert approached Sandy's hospitable door, to be greeted with a most delicious aroma of roasting chicken from the stove.. With the exchange of Christmas greetings, Robert at once appreciated the home-like spirit there, although he could not help but think of the two previous Christmasses and their associations and memories. It was only a few minutes before the savory chickens were placed on the table along with baked potatoes, vegetables, Christmas pudding and deep-apple pie with Devonshire cream. Surely a meal fit for a king and beautifully prepared by bachelor Sandy, too! After doing full justice to the dinner, the

two men drifted into a conversation about poets and authors. Sandy, delighting, of course, in paying tribute to the great "Robbie" Burns with his verse to the fieldmouse, and his poesy as shown particularly in "Flow gently sweet Afton" or "To Mary in Heaven."

The afternoon passed pleasantly, but too quickly for both men and was already spent when Robert took his leave, so that he might keep his promise to Mrs. Adams and arrive in time for her party. In a short while he was one of a party of young people Mrs. Adams had kindly invited to her home, knowing they were all from homes too far distant to visit at this time.

Though the hour was late when Robert arrived home, he sat down to finger through a new catalogue from a large jewellery company to choose a ring that would fittingly express his truth and love to Betty. If he ordered it now he would have it in time to give it to her at the Hartmors' New Years' party. After much thought the ring was selected, but it was very different in design to the one he had given Mamie, which now lay packed away in his trunk. Although he couldn't bear the sight of it, he had no desire to part with it, although he'd had several opportunities through the store to dispose of it. The spirit of Christmas carried through the week and although Robert attended several parties, it was remarked, however, that he did not show the same enthusiasm now that Betty was away. However, the ring had been received and he was looking forward to the surprise he would give Betty at the New Year.

The day soon came, bright and clear with cold frosty air, and Robert, having been asked to noon dinner, was up early and ready to leave for Hartmors' long before the appointed time. At last he was on his way and soon was sitting in the comfortably furnished room of the Hartmor's discussing the details of their trip. After partaking of a big dinner and vainly offering to wash dishes, Robert and Betty decided to go for a skate, which would afford them an opportunity for private conversation as well as healthful exercise. So by the time they'd put in two hours' skating and taken a long walk, they reached home just in time for supper. During the meal the Hartmors said they were invited to the Adams' for the evening, asking Robert and Betty to keep house for them.

An hour later, with the world on the outside, a cozy glow from the coal-fire in the heater, softened lights, and the girl of his

dreams beside him, Robert was in the seventh heaven of delight, and as Betty responded to his loving caresses and words of endearment, the opportune moment for his surprise arrived very quickly. Beaming with happiness, he took from his pocket a small plush box and taking her hand said, "Betty, dearest, here's a little New Year's gift, but it's for life," as he placed the beautiful sparkling gem on her finger. With an air of great surprise, she arose to her feet saying, "Oh Robert, how wonderful!" and in the next moment she reached towards him, offering her lips to his in a seal of true fidelity.

With talk of their future together and plans for the wedding to take place at Easter if nothing intervened, the evening passed quickly till Mrs. Hartmor returned. As soon as her sister appeared Betty rushed up to her in a spirit of pride, displaying her ring, as she exclaimed, "See what the fairies brought me." Hearty congratulations were the order after the first surprise was registered and then Mrs. Hartmor served a snack to bring to a close a really perfect day for Betty and Robert.

A few days later, Mrs. Hartmor, who came from Metropole, thinking that her sister's engagement would be of interest to their friends; sent a notice of the engagement to the society page, of one of the leading newspapers; with a picture of her sister. But little did she know the sorrow and trial it would bring to one person!

Mamie had just returned to Metropole after spending her Christmas holidays at home, but for reasons of her own had not seen fit to tell her parents of her break with Robert, or indeed of her racy and frothy style of living. It was evening of the day she returned when, opening the evening paper to note the most daring entertainment offered, her attention was caught by a headline on the society page, announcing the engagement of Robert Benson of Badgerton and Miss Elizabeth Ann (Betty) Dixon (formerly of Metropole). Seeing the profile picture of the girl a feeling of shocked surprise at once came over her, then one of hate as she felt that here was the girl who had taken the place in Robert's heart which she had voluntarily vacated. Finally she realized the true state of her feelings and comprehended fully how much Robert really meant to her as she screamed, "Too late! Too late!" The shock was more than her high-strung nerves could stand, and her house-friends who heard her, seeing that she was on the edge of collapse, called a doctor.

Suffering from nervous prostration, Mamie lay in her bed two

weeks before her hastily-summoned parents were able to take her back home for further nursing.

As a result of much intense thought during those months of convalescence from her mental sickness, when she reviewed her recent period of dissipation and pleasure-seeking, Mamie worked out a new and truer set of values. She decided she would tell them the whole truth when she was well again and that she would begin a new life, depending only on her own resources. This decision was to take her from her present studies, for she had decided to devote her life to nursing.

The excitement of the Yuletide season was over, but for Robert there was much planning and arranging for the big event to ensure Betty and he getting away to the best start possible. He checked the little bungalow daily for ideas leading to improvements and in figuring what furnishings remained to be purchased. This gave Betty and him many hours of pleasant discussion, so much so that some of the members of the hockey team were beginning to attribute any off nights to Robert, for not being in form! The weeks quickly passing, it was decided that the wedding would be held the Wednesday of the first week in April, preceding Easter. Mrs. Hartmor suggested a church wedding with a reception in the hall, her own home not being large enough, and the lovers were quite agreeable. The six weeks preceding were filled with working out details of the ceremony, the trousseau, the luncheon, the list of invited guests, so that before they knew it, the great day was almost at hand. Robert was to be assisted by his old friend, Jimmy Wilson, while Betty's bridesmaid was a school-teacher friend named Miss Loretta Armstrong, while Mr. Hartmor was to give her away.

Finally the wedding day came round and long before the nuptial hour, the church was filled to standing-room, one of the most outstanding spectators being Sandy, who had been in the church only once before. After a very beautiful but solemn ceremony the bride and groom received the blessing of the minister and were then whisked away to the hall, ready to receive the reception guests. Too much time could not be spent here, however, as Robert and Betty had to catch the evening train that would take them on a ten days' visit to several leading American cities. They left their guests in time to return to Mrs. Hartmor's home and change into travelling clothes and were soon speeding away on the west-bound train, carrying with them the goodwill of many friends whose regard had already been expressed in tangible form.

CHAPTER 27

Impatience is something that should be rooted out of every life for it often is the cause of false judgment.—Nota Bene.

THE train bringing them back to their honeymoon's end and to the commencement of a greater journey over life's matrimonial highway arrived on time and Mrs. Hartmor took them back for a prepared supper at her home, after which George arrived with the horse and buggy to take them home. Soon they were approaching their pretty bungalow which was reflecting the sun's sinking rays from its windows creating the impression of a cheery welcome.

Robert was up bright and early the next morning to carry on the seeding, having again severed his connection with the store, and during the next few weeks he worked so hard that the evenings found him with little appetite for caresses but much desire for rest.

Only a week later Betty saw Sandy come up the road and turn into the yard with a beautiful Jersey cow tied behind his waggon. She became quite enthusiastic when Sandy told her nonchalantly that this was a little wedding gift he had brought over and she followed him to the stable to watch him tie up the cow. While there he gave her some hints as to how to milk her, then jokingly remarked, the one he recommended was to never know how. Then with a few words of pleasant conversation he left, but not before Betty had made him promise to come to dinner when the seeding rush was over.

When Robert returned from the field, she could not wait till he had put the horses away to tell him of Sandy's gift. A few minutes later, viewing it with considerable pride, Robert turned to her and said, "That man is a conundrum. He has a loving heart for those he believes are honest and upright, and I am extremely happy that I've found favor in his sight, although in some ways he looks upon me as a child of innocence."

The first two months had brought them considerable pleasure and happiness in adjusting their dispositions to each others' moods, but there were times, however, when Robert could not help but

compare the impersonal and reticent manner of Betty with that of Mamie, who had always been so frank and spontaneous. Whether it was a foreboding of regret or not, Robert could not help but feel that Betty's love was more in the form of respect or honor to him than a real depth of feeling. Although she had deceived him, many of those pleasant thrills Mamie's company had given him lingered in his mind.

It was about a month later that Betty and Robert, doing their first bit of entertaining in their new home, decided to experiment and invite Sandy and the minister and his wife to dinner on the same occasion. Robert was rather doubtful, but with the Adams' and the Hartmors as guests also, he doubted there would be any awkwardness between the first two mentioned, and there wasn't! Sandy arrived at three o'clock and thus was able to have a chat with Robert and Betty alone, which incidentally, was to give Sandy another angle on Robert's life, that not only proved of great value to both of them, but a real blessing. The other guests arrived a little later and after a most delicious dinner, a pleasant discussion was had on several local matters, but ending up with literature. Robert mentioned Sandy's knowledge of great writers and Mr. Hartmor, knowing something of Sandy's ability, asked him if he had made a study of Goldsmith's life, and if so, what had been the inspiration for the famed descriptive poems, "The Traveller" and "The Deserted Village." Sandy at once entered into a full history of the works, giving the information in such brief and concise manner that everyone was deeply impressed. He finished his recital with some of the outstanding events of the author's life, quoting from memory many of the lines so filled with love and pathos. Realizing that here was a man of talent and education, the minister at once asked him if he would not favor the young people of the church with an address on some aspects of standard literature when the busy season was over, but Sandy declined, thinking it might not be advisable. After a little desultory conversation, the guests made their farewells.

In spite of the long and arduous weeks of summer work on the farm, each Sabbath found both Robert and Betty in their accustomed places at church, their faith in the belief that a conscientious Christian life is the only one that can give peace and contentment, and that Jesus' saving power is sufficient to meet all the trials of life, growing ever stronger. This faith which, to him,

obviated the taking out of hail insurance, brought him into arguments with his neighbours, especially Sandy. Robert maintained that if one's faith in God's mercy was great enough, hail insurance wasn't needed.

The matter, strangely enough, was soon put to the test, as on the Sunday following, just about evening service time, a terrific storm gathered in the West. It broke in all its fury, leaving a strip of country, fifteen miles long and from two to five miles in width, completely hailed out and totally destroying the crops of two good church members, who, it was learned, were partly covered by insurance! The storm went within a mile and a half of Robert's place, but left his crops unscathed. The matter was discussed by a puzzled Robert next day with Sandy, who maintained Robert was taking too great a chance. Robert arrived at the conclusion that if the two members had not shown their lack of faith by partly insuring their crop, God would have protected them. His faith was not shallow—no hail insurance for him!

Three weeks later, when everything in his fields was in stook, awaiting the thresher, he looked over the rows of sheaves running off in all directions, and was filled with pride. Then musing on his marital affairs he realized the conviction was growing within him that his married life was not all that he had expected. There had been several misunderstandings lately, which would not have occurred, he thought, if his love were fully reciprocated. Still before their friends, they appeared as an ideally-mated couple.

CHAPTER 28

I am sure no living man loves a woman because she is a woman. Her attraction lies in her special appeal, to his desires, comfort and mentality, whatever one happens to be the most dominant in their composition.—Anon.

Two days later when Robert was at Sandy's helping him to stack oat sheaves, Sandy noting his worried look posed his queries to him so tactfully, that before he realized it Robert was telling of his marital doubts to his best friend. "To make a long story short," he said to Sandy, "I have to admit that I sometimes think I made a grave mistake in marrying Betty, without first knowing her better, for I have begun to think that perhaps circumstances and environment and not love brought about our marriage. Sandy, now assuming his usual attitude when in deep thought then said, "I have thought there was some discordancy in your home, since I visited you two months ago, but I believe your surmise is wrong, and you are as much to blame for the principles that make for happy wedded life, as your wife is, in not knowing how love can be made to glow with greater radiance."

"I am now going to be very frank with you, and if I say something that hurts your sensitive feelings, do not blame me but the system that allows such idealism to wreck homes through want of proper education, thus creating false ideals. Your wife, I am fully convinced from what I know of her retiring, and innocent appearing disposition, is what we will call for shorter name, a frigidine. The name given by the medical profession is congenital frigidity, which in plainer words, is the absence of desire or pleasure in sexual relations, and with which some of them claim from twenty to forty per cent. of all women are afflicted and from ten to twenty per cent. of men are thus affected. In the past this condition has been too often caused by the ignorant and prudish teaching of mothers, who themselves were brought up to regard sexual relations as unclean and indecent, forgetful of the fact that behind them is the Divine wisdom that makes such relations the first principle of life. Therefore, what is ordained of God must be Holy.

"We also find that the first requisite of love is sex attraction, Sandy continued, "and if necessary to bring the truth closer home, you know from your own experiences. It is the beautiful and voluptuous that commands attention and not the deformed and unattractive, but through so called culture and modern influences, many natural restraints have been built up. Again there are born many frigidines, and who is there to prove it is not a blessing to the race when we behold the oversexed roués, and prostitutes. Why this should be so rests with the power behind it all, but is further evidence that we are not all born equals in this life with so called chance for Salvation.

Many become victims from repressed desire, for in accordance with the moral standards of our day, women must keep their virginity until married or be despised as social outcasts. But due to demand of higher education the age of mating is being continually set back and many girls become victims till it becomes habitual, then through lack of proper sex education they remain forever blind to the sublime part sex should play in their love life.

"Our educational system upholds the necessity of spending four to seven years to fit ourselves in the different sciences, many of which include subjects such as the dead languages; that to the average student is time wasted, still do not consider it necessary to have their boys and girls instructed in the long tabooed subject of sex, the most important of all science, that would take the emotion-alism out of lovesickness, and make happier homes. Still we claim to be the advance guard of civilization. It is high time to give up these silly notions when we look around and see the divorce mills working overtime, and some saying "Away with the marriage ceremony," which so many believe is sanctioned in Heaven, and a few years later are rudely awakened with the thought, "It couldn't happen here," only to find too late they had been asleep at the switch.

"There should be a law compelling every couple before they are given the sacred license to wed, to prove they fully understand the laws of sex life, even if it had to be by examination. It would prove of more material benefit than the health laws of some countries. As in too many cases the license given today means very little more than a permit to commit adultery."

At this Robert jumped up, as he said, "Sandy, this is going

too far," but Sandy waved him down, saying, "Wait till I'm through. You know castor oil is hard to take, but it is a great system toner! Hiding our ignorance behind a cloak of modesty is not going to bring about the needed change. The solemnity and implications of the marriage ceremony are not realized by seventy-five per cent. of the principals taking part in them, and you know it! From what I've said I trust you will not arrive at the opinion that sex is the all-important factor in love, as it requires the judgment of those who have made it a life study to define the place where sex appeal ends and the glorious refining passion begins. The only thing to do is to read books on the subject by authors who are above reproach, and search out the truth in the quiet of your own home, and when you are convinced of the great truths, you will be able to open up a conversation on the subject in which your wife will be interested, so that she will wish to read the books, to her own edification."

Robert was looking somewhat perplexed as Sandy said, "If there is any point I have not made clear, tell me and I'll try to straighten you out." At this Robert asked "Is there no way to tell love from sex appeal?" Sandy replied, "I think what you have in mind is a case where possibly the parties themselves are not sure of their feeling which quite often is only too true having no experience or reliable information to guide them. Now, in order that you may understand human nature better, you must have sex education, whereby the higher ideals of life can be grafted into your life after the baser ideals have been removed. I am convinced your wife loves you dearly, but due to her feelings and mannerisms is unable to display that emotion, and you, with your dramatic type of temperament and spontaneous nature, think she should have the same temperament and nature. Our most imperative need in this age is judicious sex education."

Sandy had hardly finished the last word before Robert asked quickly, as if on impulse, "Which is the greater love, that of mother or that of wife?" Sandy remained for some minutes silent, possibly thinking of his own mother, then said, "The question is one with many debatable angles, but I think we can agree on this point, that the love of a wife is different from that of a mother, in as much that a wife's love lies in appeal, is jealous, and possessive, while the love of a mother is instinctive, protective, with

unfaltering faith. There is, however, no rule or standard whereby a more reliable answer can be given.

Sandy then placed his pipe on the window as a look towards the clock showed him it was again time to get the team out, but as he did so Robert remarked, for him not to go at work too hard, as he wanted him to give his opinions on Evolution that evening.

CHAPTER 29

*If you want to know God in spirit and in truth,
seek him not in theories or sectarianism, but
out on the highways and byways of Nature.—
Nota Bene.*

AFTER an afternoon of hard stacking and supper over, Sandy and Robert rested outside the house. With his old pipe well underway, Sandy opened the conversation by saying, "You have asked me to discuss Evolution with you from the viewpoint of my own acceptance of the theory. In suggesting the topic, I suppose you really want to know if I believe man is descended from a monkey? Well, first of all, I think the jump from a protoplasm (rhizopod) up to monkey, then to man is too big a jump for my reasoning, apart from many other angles such as cosmogony, or cosmology which are the fundamental bases that must first be considered. I believe in an all-wise God who has a perfect plan, which my finite mind is unable to comprehend in all its magnitude, therefore, I strive only to understand the things that nature teaches by its cause and effect on life, leaving the why and the wherefore of them with that infallible power behind the plan, whom I believe to be God."

"Evolution, however, in the true sense of the word appears to be a fact that is almost indisputable in nature, anyway, with such a preponderance of evidence as shown in the infinitesimal seed that in a few months produced the beautiful flower or fruit after its kind, the acorn that falls to mother earth, and becomes a giant tree, or the egg that becomes a bird or an animal, but when it comes to believing that man with his superior intelligence has to look back to the orang-outang or some of his progenitors and admit that they were his ancestors, it is going beyond what my reasoning or credulity can accept. It makes me suggest that it would be just as easy for us to accept de-volution and expect that in the ages to come, the fierce monarch of the jungle, the lion, would de-volve back into a sardine. There are so many scientific guesses made that, without appearing to be unduly egotistical, I have just as much confidence in my own guess, based on my own study of the question," Sandy contended.

"In spite of all the fossilized remains of mammals, reptiles and amphibians and museum displays of the Neanderthal man and the Java man, I am still forced to turn from this preponderance of evidence submitted and ask, "How is it that during the six thousand years of which we have any historical record, neither mankind nor the animal kingdom have made any perceptible change in their evolutionary processes, except in a minor way, in which certain animals of the same kind have been crossed, giving what we know as different breeds, and that only accomplished through man's intelligence. And even there man has his limitations, for, when he crosses an ass with a mare to bring into being a mule, the mule cannot produce its own kind."

"We shall now bring forward for examination a few of the many claims made by the champions of the theory of evolution. They claim that the lowest and simplest forms of life are the oldest as shown by fossil remains (shells and bones) found in stratified rock and sand in the outer part of the earth's crust. These were the first beginnings of life, they say, from the original first spark in a protoplasm or amoeba, which had its beginning in the warm primeval seas thousands or millions of years before. Then, more millions of years were required to bring into existence the lowest type of fish, known as the vertebrates. Then after more eons of time, a back bone was produced. After further great periods of time came the beginnings of the animal kingdom, with its great reptiles and giant-like prehistoric monsters, with brains too small to control their bodies. Then, for some inexplicable reason, the Evolutionary process seems to have slipped and gone backward as we next find these monsters were replaced by a dwarf species such as crocodiles, lizards and turtles. Then came the birds and mammals and finally after eons of time man arrives on the scene. According to Slade and Ferguson to estimate the age of the world we should consider three hundred and sixty-five millions of years as a year, with one million years as a day, and on this basis it was the evening of December 31st before man appeared in Egypt. Why Egypt I ask? The Egyptians have shown by their culture and high standard of civilization, proof of which is given in the presence of pyramids, that they are hardly liable to have descended from monkeys."

"Further evidence is then brought forward, showing how all the five hundred muscles, the two hundred bones and thirty-two teeth, belonging to man, correspond exactly with those found in

other mammals, especially man's supposed closest progenitor, the orang-outang, which, they claim, also has the same five organs of sense, the same embryonic development, the same emotions of surprise, hatred, grief, jealousy and shame. However, it yet remains for me to see a monkey expressing shame! Still we will go so far as to admit this produces enough evidence to suggest a common hereditary basis, but that does not prove the theory of Evolution—indeed, it cannot be considered more than a hypothesis."

"The workings of the solar system, the marvellous perfection of which is revealed to us daily, is too great for our finite minds to even grasp, any conception of its magnitude, except a few primary facts; which is but further evidence, that it and all creation, did not come into being, by blind chance. Therefore is the evidence I want to bring forward that creation and development of man, was not left to evolution. My rationalized philosophy makes me believe in a Divine power, I am pleased to call God, whose law is nature, and matter the subject it works upon. The Evolution theory is that all creative power is in matter, thus doing away with God, which from their own claim, is proven to be a delusion, for they are trying to build a system, around a power, they can in no way account for."

Now for the sequence of cause and effect, that makes a seed a plant, a plant a flower, a flower a seed, a bird an egg, an egg a bird,—science can tell us all the composites that make a blade of grass, but no scientist has ever grown a blade from planting these ingredients.—which is further evidence of the limitation of our reasoning sphere. From my personal observations, this great power, that governs the earth, and other planets in their orbits, is the same power that creates all life. This again raises the question, from whence comes this compelling force and power; and no better answer having yet been given we still ascribe it to God. In the acceptance of this attribute it should remove, egotistical ideas, self-complacency, that could cause a doubt.

"One of the great tasks before us in life, is to try and help those which possibly due to their environment, have never had opportunity to visualize—that beyond the dark, misty, perspective of life; which now seems to encompass our pilgrimage—there is a Beacon of Hope; behind whose portals, "Divine Justice reigns." Where the perplexities of so many religious views, the trials and adversities of love, the anguish and affliction of war,

will be seen as chaff on a threshing floor, from which a greater and truer set of values have been obtained through experience. There remains only this to say, that if the scientific explanation of life and creation no more meets the needs of to-day than the religious orthodoxy of the past, which calls us to reverence the Bible, as the inspired word of God, which I think is a man-made book, then humanitarianism calls to us, in the name of brotherly love, to be more considerate, more compassionate, in allowing the expression of free thought, so that our laws, and dealings with our fellowmen, will make this world a better place to live in."

Robert, who had realized he didn't know enough about the theory of evolution to put up any sensible argument, then thanked Sandy, saying, "Your points have given me a greater understanding of the subject than I ever had before." Sandy replied, "It has always given me a pleasure to speak to you on any subject in which I felt you would be interested, and especially this one which is a much debated question."

Then as the lengthening shadows showed the evening was only partly spent, Robert looked at his watch to make sure it wasn't too late, and said, "Sandy, I would give a great deal to have the insight you have into many of the big questions of life, and after listening to this masterly discourse, I feel more receptive than ever to the conclusions you have reached that this life is but an age of experience. Now if it is not asking too much I would like to have your views on this point which you brought up before, that is, if you do not believe in the Hell of the Bible, and still believe that sin is punished, how can you reconcile the two statements if there is no Hell?" Sandy took a few minutes' breather, then replied, "I think the theory of the Bible that there is an actual Hell has done more towards breaking down the morals of mankind than any other influence, for throughout the dark ages of history this word instilled more fear into the human mind than the sword. Now as you are a believer in the inspiration of the Bible, I think it will be quite in order for me to use that book as proof of much I am going to say, for this same book is supposed to teach that Hell of Torments is to be the penalty meted out to the unsaved. I doubt if any word in the English, or any other language, has been called upon to bear the stigma that has been attached to the word 'Hell' due to the meaning that has been woven around it by those who practise Christianity. They say it is a place ruled over by the spirit of evil

called the Devil, where tortures, trials and tribulations are to be administered throughout an endless eternity to humanity for the sins they have committed in this life, and for those inherited out of the misty past, from our supposed first parents in the Garden of Eden. There, it is claimed, they partook of forbidden fruit through a lie told them, which in their innocence, they believed. It was supposed to be told them by this same Devil who had the power and subtlety to be able to appear and converse with them in the form of a serpent, this being the Genesis story upon which Christianity is founded. This Christianity is a religion now divided into so many sects and isms due to the creed makers, who, selfishly or ignorantly place certain interpretations upon scriptural verses taken from the book called the Bible, which they claim is the inspired word of God, but which nearly every true student of history knows is a man-made book.

"In order, however, to start at the beginning of my contention, which is that Hell is a condition and not a place, it is necessary to give you the true meaning of the word found in any modern dictionary. The root meaning of Hell is found to be a dark and silent place, a hole in the earth, a cave or a pit, such as a farmer often makes in a field to protect his roots and vegetables, which the English farmer calls helling them, or placing them in Hell for the winter. There are various meanings in other languages as follows: in the German, as the word *Hehlen* (meaning to hide); in the Latin, *Celare* (to hide); in the Greek, *Hades*, and the Hebrew, *Sheol* (to hide in the earth); the Babylonian, *Aralu* (a cave), and the Egyptian, *Amentet* (the West) which possibly gave the suggestive meaning used so much during the Great War, (they have gone west) in speaking of departed ones. So with this further evidence as to the original meaning of the word, it can be conclusively stated that being in Hell would mean being buried in the earth. Linking up Hell with God, as Christians have done in the past, has done more to defame His name than can be counteracted by all the teachings that endeavor to prove His great love as personal benefactor to Mankind, whereby He allowed His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, to come to earth and be shamefully put to death on a cross, as atonement for our sins."

"The reason for that state of affairs was because, in the Dark Ages, the monarchs and princes of the Christian Church used this Hell, a material thing, as a means of keeping their peoples in a state of subjection. Mystery was attached to the name and it

could mean anything evil. Thus, all down the ages from the beginning of the Christian era, religious fanatics, zealots, superstitious bigots, and political intriguer like Constantine the Great, have used the teachings of the Bible to mystify, and get a stranglehold on, the minds of the people."

"When I make assertions of this kind, those like yourself, sincere in the faith of the creeds you have been taught; and a halo of reverence, that kept the Bible from any critical examination until a hundred years ago when Voltaire, made his attack, on both the clergy, and the Bible. This being the first wedge of doubt, that has been continually driven deeper, till today,—The seeker after Truth demands more reliable information than what the Council of Nice have handed down with their blessing, after days of dissension and strife, as being God's revelation to man. Again who is responsible for the different translations of the Bible we are given, are they man made deductions, or are we to believe God changes His plans.

The creeds teach emphatically, there is such a place as Hell, and that all whose names are not written in the Book of Life, will be confined there throughout an endless eternity. The proof submitted is different verses taken from the Bible; some of which we are now going to bring forward for examination under the searchlight of Reason and Truth, using the Bible itself to prove that it does not in any way support the idea that Hell is a place of fire and torment for the damned."

"The Bible accredits Job as being one of its most perfect and upright characters, therefore it should be of interest to know what light can be shed on this subject from the book bearing his name. On examination of it we find that here the original Hebrew word (Sheol) translated elsewhere as Hell is translated here as grave. Why this change? If a word means a certain thing in one place, it cannot very reasonably have a different meaning somewhere else. The answer, however, can best be given by citation of the verse in full as it appears, Job, Chapter 14, Verse 13: "O that thou wouldest hide me in the grave, that thou wouldest keep me secret, until thy wrath be past, that thou wouldest appoint me a set time and remember me." Here is specific evidence of juggling of words, as it would never have done for the translators to have placed Job in such a place as the fundamentalists would have us believe Hell is, in order to keep him secret. But the big question to be answered is, if the Bible is an inspired book, upon whose authority was

this change made? We again read in Job, Chapter 17, Verse 13, these words: 'If I wait the grave is mine house; I have made my bed in the darkness', here again it can be easily seen why the word Hell with all its fire and flames was not used, as it would have been a rather difficult place to make a bed in the darkness. Thus we find proof plainly given of the inconsistency of the translators and others responsible for the making of our present day Bible.

"In Acts, Chapter 2, Verses 30 to 32, we are told by the writer, whoever he may have been, that Jesus' soul went to Hell but was raised again, which suggests the question that can be asked in all sincerity, that as the Bible teaches that Hell is a place of torment, then how could He get out? Of course we know the usual conjectured answer that all things are possible with God, but this question brings us face to face with the teaching of the Trinity in which we are asked to believe that three are one, the Father, Son and Holy Ghost. If this thought were taken seriously, the question would be, what power raised Him, He being one-third of the God-head? No, this kind of metaphysical nonsense, will not do under the searchlight of modern thought and commonsense for if the scriptures were true and God's inspired word, they would require no man-made alibi to support their authenticity."

Robert here interrupted Sandy, saying, "I cannot agree with that assertion, for has God not shown all down the ages that his desires and commands have been made known through men, and because of the phraseology used the finger of criticism has been pointed towards them, trying to show that their words were not inspired. But on turning to history we find many of the prophecies they made have been fulfilled. Isn't that proof itself?"

This somewhat sudden interruption gave Sandy some pause, but he finally replied: "Your line of argument might be all very well if it were men only we were speaking of, but you must remember it is a God of all power and knowledge we were also discussing. With all due respect to your viewpoint, it is one that the upholders of the Christian faith have taken refuge in whenever some favorite verse or pet dogma has been attacked. When you talk of inspired words, who is the authority to decide what is inspired and what is not? If I ask you if you believe Robert Burns was inspired when he wrote "To Mary in Heaven," you'll probably say 'yes', but if I ask the same question about his writing of The Cotter's Saturday Night, you would probably say 'no', because it was too worldly. Is that so or is it not?"

Robert thought for some moments, then replied, "Yes, I think I would say that about "To Mary in Heaven," but I am not familiar enough with the other poem to express a candid opinion," at which Sandy continued, "Well that practically goes to prove that the environment under which our minds have been trained or influenced is responsible for a great deal of what we want to believe or accept in life, and the same applies to inspiration of the Bible."

"In Genesis, Chapter 42, Verse 38," Sandy continued, "Jacob is supposed to have said, 'My son shall not go down with you for his brother is dead, and he is left alone; if mischief befall him by the way in which ye go, then shall ye bring down my gray hairs with sorrow to the grave (Sheol).' Here again is found the word grave used in the King James version while in the revised, the word is left in the original Sheol, as, no doubt, the translators believed it would be a considerable tax on credulity, to place gray hairs in such a place as we are led to believe Hell is. It is also evidence in itself that the only thought Jacob had in mind was the grave. In Ecclesiastes, Chapter 9, Verse 5, are these words: 'Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might, for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom in the grave (Sheol) whither thou goest'. Surely to those who consider the Bible as God's word of truth, this would be sufficient evidence to prove that in every case where the word 'Sheol' appears, it should have been translated 'grave', and that the fire and torment theory is but a lying imposition."

"A careful examination of practically every passage in either the Old and New Testament is but further vindication of this statement, as, for example in Mark, Chapter 9, Verses 47 and 48, Jesus is supposed to have said to his disciples in teaching a lesson on humility: 'And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out; it is better for thee to enter the Kingdom of God, with one eye, than having two eyes to be cast into Hell fire where the worm dieth not and the fire is not quenched.' Here the word Hell has been translated from the Greek word Gehenna. Now if this is taken literally, as its exponents want us to, we find it is only the worms that have immortality! Surely if Jesus ever spoke these words, He spoke them in the form of a parable, in which way He was wont to teach.

"In Second Peter, Chapter 2, Verse 4, we find the word Hell has here been translated from the word 'Tartaroo'. Why this trans-

lation is used is again hard to understand except that the translators believed it would be a good place to leave the wicked angels! 'For if God spared not the angels that sinned but cast them down to Hell and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment'. This word, almost unknown in the Greek language, was, no doubt, derived from the word Tartarus, meaning a dark abyss, which again is in accord with the proper translation of Sheol (the grave) and which also more reasonably conforms with the thought contained in the balance of the verse as to how they were confined in chains of darkness, for surely no one can make fiery Hell jibe with darkness!

"For a concluding reference let us turn to the Book of Revelation which, if not a conglomeration of unintelligible symbols, has no meaning one can possibly understand, in my estimation, for if such a supposed vision were found anywhere else but in the Bible, it would at once be characterized as a frightful nightmare! But one consolation, few ever read it so that it may be considered harmless. Here will be found several verses in which Hell plays a very important part. Revelation, Chapter 19, Verse 20; Chapter 20, Verses 14-15; Chapter 21, Verse 8, among the most outstanding of its statements are the words in Chapter 20, Verse 14, which reads, 'And death and Hell were cast into a lake of fire'. This is the second death. Now it will be observed that the whole picture given of Hell is like unto a lake of fire, so, from this statement then is it to be understood one fire has the power to consume the other, and if so, where does the efficiency come in? And if mankind have immortal never-dying souls, just what explanation can be offered for this second death? What we want," said Sandy, "is truth, in the light of intelligent commonsense, and not the blah, blah of irrationalism, for Christianity is true or it is not true, and with so many questionable statements in the book on which it is based, it is high time they were established as correct beyond a doubt or else discarded forever, which happens to all goods weighed in the balance and found wanting."

Robert, waiting impatiently to break in, now said, "Sandy, I congratulate you on the very able way in which you have endeavored to show up the faulty theories on which the doctrine of Hell is based, but many of your statements are colored with your own coloring. Again you may not be aware of the fact, through not coming to church for some years that Hell is not taught the same as it used to be." In reply Sandy said, "The remark you have made

is quite in order. I have colored many of the statements which I quoted, but I also gave the facts. Now it is up to you to say which, when weighed in the balance, will be found wanting. I will leave this with you to answer to your best judgment. In regard to what you say about the church giving up the teaching of Hell, I know, that without going to church, they have also discarded to a great extent, the idea of the Trinity, the Virgin Birth, the miracles that are recounted therein; and also that the Bible is an inspired book. Many so called Christians to-day prefer to be called Modernists whereas a more fitting name would be Moralists, as it seems their desire to hold on to practical truths and discard the rest. Would it not be better to admit the insolvency of these teachings, as belonging to the mysticism of the past, and replace them with more logical ideals that would carry us onward, and forward, to a greater experience on life's realities; and more advanced civilization.

Both now sat silent for some moments viewing the harvest moon, then Sandy got up from his chair saying, "the soft side of a mattress will be better for the both of us, I think," and with a quick "goodnight" Robert was gone to his own home.

CHAPTER 30

It is poor judgment that believes because a cocoon is gray and commonplace, it does not contain the chrysalis of a beautiful butterfly.

—Nota Bene.

FOR the next three days Betty saw little of Robert, as he was busy threshing, but on Sunday he was able to spend most of the day with her, and whether it was owing to his recent absence or the new ideas Sandy had given him about her, he soon realized how much pleasanter their time together now was. After several weeks threshing Robert was able to realize \$3,350 on his crops, of which he gave Sandy \$2,000 for loans on house and land, leaving the rest to take care of taxes, implements, etc.

Fall plowing was now the order of the day and Robert, enthused at his success, plowed every available acre ready for a bigger crop than ever next year. With the winter season the rink was quickly opened with greater hockey enthusiasm than ever, but Robert hurt his leg in an early practice game and was out for the season. However, it afforded him the pleasure of spending many evenings at home during which he read several of the books from Sandy's library, including one on married happiness, from which he, and Betty also, benefitted considerably.

With Spring came a double reason for rejoicing as a son, christened George Robert, after Robert's father, was born to Betty and Robert, Betty setting up, as it were, a new altar at which both met in a spirit of adoration. It was also the means of touching off a budding romance, for Betty's oldest sister, Lorraine, a nurse, who had come west to be with her sister during her illness, having taken a position at the coming city of Saskalo, with the intention of having her mother move in with her the coming Fall. She was a girl of charming character and what she lacked in beauty of face was fully made up in her broad-minded intelligence. She was present on the first occasion Sandy was invited over to see the new heir. Although he had always shown indifference to girls, Betty and Robert noticed his open and attentive attitude toward Lorraine and that he enjoyed discussing topics of interest with her

in place of Robert. Although Lorraine took much kidding about it, she did admit that there was something magnetic about "that man"!

The next Sunday afternoon they were all greatly surprised to find a well-dressed gentleman knocking at Robert's door, whom, they concluded, must be a traveller about to enquire for the main road. On opening the door they failed to recognize the person as Sandy, for he was clean-shaven, until his voice gave recognition. When they all began to compliment him on how much younger he now looked, it struck Robert that it was the first time he had ever seen him stand for so much flattery, but Sandy quickly closed off the matter by saying he had decided to keep shaved during the hot weather. After the usual greetings, he devoted practically all his attention to Lorraine, and although he refused to stay for tea, he invited Lorraine to drive to the next town, to take in a football game, a few nights later. Robert laughingly told her about the comforts of Sandy's old buckboard, but he had the surprise of his life, when a few evenings later, Sandy drove up in a new rubber-tired buggy, the first in the district, with one of his best horses, a beautiful grey percheron. It was soon common knowledge that Sandy had at last fallen for Robert's sister-in-law, hook, line and sinker, and to Mr. and Mrs. Hartmor, this was real news for, although Lorraine was still on the sunny side of thirty, she had never before had her name linked with any man, and to them, Sandy was a real catch. In a month, however, she assumed her new duties at Saskola, and no one but Sandy knew what would happen next in the romance.

Once again Robert was blessed with good crops, this year the farmers threshing mostly from the stook and saving the heavy work of stacking. Robert received his returns from the elevator for his grain stored there, showing that at prevailing prices, it was worth sixty eight hundred dollars, and he was so pleased with his success that it took considerable advice from Betty to dissuade him from buying another quarter section!

In the Fall, George the hired man, decided to visit his people in the Old Country, so Robert had to stay on his farm instead of going back to the store for the winter as usual. However, as he had some spare time he purchased some cattle and hogs for feeding. There were many festivities in which to take part during the winter, and always Robert Junior to take out when it was not too cold.

When Spring came back again, it opened with the usual promise, but as the main growing season approached, the time when the west is either made or lost for the year by generous rains or lack thereof, there were two weeks of drought that stunted the whole crop, causing it at once to shoot up small heads that later were to ripen with very little in them. So, Robert now was pleased he had taken Betty's advice against buying another quarter, even though it had been woman's inherent intuition rather than foresight for the prospect was now that there would not be more than a third of the average crop. September found money tighter as a result but the month brought considerable joy to the Benson home for the stork paid another visit, bringing to Robert Junior, a sister with dark curly hair and blue eyes and the combined good looks of her parents. She was christened Ethel Lorraine, after her aunt, who was unable, owing to her other duties, to be present for the occasion.

This new found pleasure helped off-set their disappointment in the crop-returns, but, being able to make the land payment, with Sandy not asking them for the interest, the cloud of financial worry quickly passed over, and Robert was soon increasing his stock for winter feeding, which called for the building of a small lean-to. In this way he was able to turn most of the poor grade of grain into cash indirectly.

The following spring, as usual, opened with great promise, but during the last of April, there were heavy frosts that held up work for ten days. Early May, however, compensated for this delay to a great extent, with its ideal working days which were not too hot to get the best from the horses. Conditions again promised another bumper crop, till in the middle of June three exceptionally hot days with south-west winds blowing sucked up every bit of moisture, making the silky broad leaves of all plant life look withered and dried up. On the evening of the third day, though, great heavy clouds began to appear in the west with distant rumblings, and the needed moisture was confidently expected, but no rain fell in Robert's district that night, while next morning the intense heat and rain-laden clouds combined to make a fog so heavy it was almost impossible to see ten feet ahead.

Robert stayed in the garden hoeing, when, after some hours, a light wind lifted the fog, while several vivid streaks of lightning with heavy thunder caused him to retire to the house and George to a nearby shed, where blacksmith work was done. He had only

been inside a few minutes when an exceptionally heavy peal of thunder took him to the window and the sight that met his gaze was one never to be forgotten, for looking to the south-west, he could see several heavy clouds rushing with great force towards each other, and all at once a small one seemed to drop below, and commenced to whirl round in a circle; soon others seemed to follow it and almost at once a funnel was formed that was making a weird display of sand and dust at the lower end or inverted apex, which now appeared to reach the ground. Having never seen such a sight before, but having read of cyclones and their fury, Robert at once believed it to be such, and seeing it zigzagging with tremendous fury towards the house, he shouted to Betty and picking up the two children, rushed to the cellar, although acting automatically. No sooner had they crouched in the nearest corner than a ripping and cracking of boards told them it was upon them. An instant later the little home in which they had taken so much pride was turned into matchwood, leaving only a small stretch of the flooring under which they crouched as if it had been partitioned off by Providence!

The shock was so quick, great, and sudden that they knelt there petrified, while a deluge of rain, followed by heavy hail and wind mowed down the crops as if by a reaper. At last it stopped, in almost an instant, and Robert rushed from the cellar way only to see the barn and other buildings torn to pieces and the horses running through the fields panic-stricken. The only building remaining whole was the small shed in which George had sheltered and was not fifteen feet from the terrible vortex. But the quiet was not for long, for soon a resounding echo of thunder was followed by a torrential downpour that made the noonday as evening.

An hour later beautiful sunshine and cool air only prevailed, a pleasure to those who had received only the much-needed rain, but to Robert the whole bottom appeared to have fallen out of his life, as he looked toward Betty who tried to hold back the tears that were scalding her eyes. Finally he said with a subdued expression, "My dear, we are still safe," as if the silent prayer he had uttered on entering the cellar had been the means of protecting them. Soon some of the townspeople arrived and reported the roof of the skating rink had been lifted a hundred feet in the air. This appeared to be the heaviest piece of damage, apart from Robert's, and now they stood around discussing the damage here, unmindful of Betty and the children standing wet and cold until Sandy rushed

up in his buggy, covered them with blankets, and soon had them all in his cottage in front of a roaring fire.

Then he returned to Robert's and soon had a salvage system working to save anything worth while. George caught the horses, still pawing and snorting with fear, and took them over to Sandy's, while Robert was busy working among the ruins with several others, endeavoring to find what clothing they could. It was some-time later before he found himself facing Sandy, who in a calm but grave voice said, "That was one of those storms that makes a lot of work but in a few days it will be only history." With a distressed look Robert replied, "But once in a lifetime is too often for such an experience," as he continued to try and bring back some semblance of order. The school teacher was the only other one to show any practical sympathy, for after doing odd jobs he came up to Robert and with a word of sympathy extended his hand unobtrusively with a ten-dollar bill in it which he passed to him, as he said, "Robert, this is not much in your great loss, but may be some help at the present time, as it is only by good fortune that we are not now all in the same position." This always remained to Robert an example of highest sympathetic action, not on account of the money, but for the kindly manner in which it was given. It was so much different, too, to the action of Rev. Marshall, whose idea of sympathy was merely to quote the text "The Lord giveth, the Lord taketh away. Blessed is the Lord," which just added fire to his already tortured soul. During the afternoon he often wondered why, having always put the things of God first, he should be so punished. Those who rendered him most help were more often those from whom it was least expected, while some of those who called him brother in church merely said they were sorry to see his great loss and drove away.

As Sandy and Robert were returning to his place on the roadway skirting Robert's fields, on which the grain was now like stubble from the heavy hail, it was noticed that Sandy's place had escaped with the exception of about twenty acres on the southwest corner, but insurance would cover that anyway. For the balance of the walk Sandy's mind was busy on what assistance he could best render, while Robert pondered on what steps he must now take for the future. At Sandy's he hurried in to see Betty and the children, but was met with such a pleasant smile he felt at once it was simulated. At the same time it brought comfort to his soul, though.

Sandy soon had an appetizing supper ready and was so thoughtful and homelike that one might have thought it was but an ordinary evening gathering, until the strange bed made Junior a little uneasy. After supper Sandy immediately suggested they re-build completely and offered to finance the whole deal, but though Betty appreciated the offer she thought it would be best for them to take a couple of rooms in town till they knew whether this crop, that had been so badly damaged, would bring them any returns or not. Robert at first demurred to her reasoning, but as he realized the amount that it would make him indebted for, with possibly no returns from the crop but a little feed, he agreed with her. They both thanked Sandy for his generous offer. Sandy, however, informed them they were perfectly welcome to remain at his place as there was plenty of room and would be a pleasure to have them, they were told.

About a week later Robert secured a small bachelor shack at the edge of the town and he and Sandy agreed that he wouldn't build till the end of the season. Any of the land too badly damaged for any chance of a crop would be summer fallowed. With this decision, George was dismissed and Robert carried on the work himself. The small shed was made over to keep a four-horse team, and during the remodeling of the building, Sandy assisted him. With the passing of the weeks, evidence of the cyclone disappeared except for the cellar and piles of broken lumber. The land was carefully summer fallowed, the remainder of the crop harvested, and with Fall near at hand a decision as to the future had to be made. Betty still said she did not want to go deeply in debt to build again, saying she'd be quite happy to live in two rooms in one of the new homes being built, and also would be much more contented if Robert went back to the store, where his job was already promised him. This plan was finally decided on, although Robert disliked the idea very much. He then sold the stock and implements and arranged to let the place out on shares for a couple of years, by which time the loss from the ill-fated, for him, year of 1913, would be partly made up.

After the sale, further payment was made to Sandy and on the land. Several offers were also made to purchase the land, but Robert favored Sandy taking it over, working it on shares, a plan Sandy no doubt made to again get Robert set up on the place, without so much debt hanging over his head. With renewed courage and the store work seeming so light after farm

work, Robert felt much happier and more hopeful that winter, especially with his family growing more interesting every day.

The coming of Spring made Robert restless, though, much to Betty's dismay for she preferred him at the store, the arrangement giving her much more of his time. Sandy had arranged to put the crop in on one-third share clear basis to Robert, which was very satisfactory, as he knew the place would be properly cared for. With the seeding over, he still yearned for farm work and meeting Carl Freiburg, who was going home to Germany because of his mother's illness there, he immediately asked if he couldn't work his place while he was gone. However, Carl replied that his man would work it during the summer and thus Robert was disappointed. Three days later Robert saw him off at the station. As he shook his hand he said, "Good-bye Carl, old pal, and God bless you till we meet again." Could he have visualized the future and seen how paradoxical those words were to prove, he would never have believed such a thing possible!

CHAPTER 31

Universal peace and justice will never be obtained from power gained by the conqueror in a cruel war or political intrigue, but in the adoption of the Golden Rule.—Nota Bene.

THE last days of July, 1914, came with promise of another bumper crop. More important still was news of war murmurings in Europe and further news that Great Britain, in defence of the honor of smaller nations, had sent her ultimatum to Germany. On August 4th the torch that set the world on fire for the next four years, was lit. Great armies at once began to move towards death and destruction, and two days later Canada's call to her sons throughout her broad domains to rally round the flag of freedom went forth. In the West, as everywhere else, blue overalls and dress suits were thrown aside for suits of khaki.

When Robert first read this news he was conscious of a new thrill of patriotism and excitement such as he had never known before, but with a loving wife and children, he hardly thought of answering the call. During the rest of the day, however, he could not get away from the thought that he should do something about it. At last he was forced to tell Betty of his feelings, but she took little notice, never thinking that before another day the one dearest to her would volunteer. That night, patriotic pride and the wish to win honor and fame that would lift him from his present humble circumstances, made up his mind for him, and next morning, at the store, he wrote a letter to the nearest recruiting station, offering his services. Before evening a wire to report the next day had come and the die was cast.

Despite severe objections by Mr. and Mrs. Hartmor, and milder remonstrances from Betty who took comfort and pride in the thought of her man serving his country while she spent a few months with the children at her mother's home in Saskola (the war would only last a little while surely) Robert stuck by his decision. They would pack their furniture and he could give Betty

eight hundred dollars for various comforts till he should return, for he also felt the war would not last more than a few months.

The next day, hurried arrangements were made for the disposal of their few pieces of furniture and farewells to their friends were made. When Sandy was met and told, a look of worry and sadness came over his face such as he had never seen before, as he asked emotionally if Robert had considered what this step meant. Not wanting to say more, he gripped his hand tightly, as he said, "May the powers of fate deal with you kindly." As he stood gazing after him Sandy trusted Robert would not meet with a similar fate to that which had befallen him when he'd gone to war!

The next morning the whole town and many from the nearby districts were at the station to wish Robert and two other boys, who had volunteered to serve their country, bon voyage. Robert was given a little extra grace in parting from his loved ones for Betty and the children accompanied him as far as Newdale Junction, where he was to report, as they continued on to Saskola. As the Junction was reached he bade his family a fond farewell, at which time, as he afterwards remembered, he had a presentiment it was likely the last. The train pulled away quickly, dividing as it were, twain hearts, which were to suffer many trials before fate would again privilege them to cross each others' paths, and the three men, reporting to the Recruiting Officer were sworn in, and within the hour were on the way to Valcartier in Quebec Province.

Six days later Robert had reached the training camp of the First Canadian Contingent, being whipped into shape by General Sir Sam Hughes. Robert had suffered disappointment en route for he had hoped to see his people in Ontario. But fate had intervened when a leave pass granted had been withdrawn before it could be used.

The great camp grew in leaps and bounds from the six thousand that had arrived the first four days to twenty-five thousand in one week who were billeted, trained and drilled into an efficient fighting machine.

Betty's first letter told him that only after he had left the train did she fully realize what his loss was going to mean to her, but each morning and night she offered up a prayer to God asking that it would be over soon and that he would return safely. His mother's letter entreated him to give it up, as it was not right to

take life as the commandment forbids it. Her prayers would ever follow him till they met again.

After being inspected by the Duke of Connaught, then Governor-General, the Duchess and their daughter, Princess Patricia, the First Contingent of the Canadian Army, 33,000 strong, marched to Quebec, sixteen miles distant through a drenching rain and embarked in the greatest armada to ever cross the Atlantic. It was convoyed by His Majesty's ships, Charybdis, Diana and Eclipse, Glory, Suffolk and Talbot. Plymouth Sound was reached on the evening of October 14th and four months' intensive training on Salisbury Plain followed.

Following review by His Late Majesty, King George Fifth, Feb. 4, 1915, a Division, composed of three infantry brigades, three artillery ammunition column engineers and divisional mounted troops, under command of Lt.-General Alderson, sailed from Avonmouth to St. Nazaire, Bay of Biscay, arriving the second week of February. A railway journey of three hundred and fifty miles landed them at Ploegstreet, or better known as the historic "Plug street" Wood, a point of the triangle of terrain to become known as the famous battlefield of Ypres. Here among this vast concourse of men, ready to do or die, was Robert, Number 7097, in the trenches, from which his company a few days later marched forward to a point near Neuve Chappelle, where the Flanders mud hampered them badly as they approached the front lines, through two feet of water to remain hidden from snipers.

The first few weeks were uneventful, so that the boys were able to accustom themselves to the unusual conditions of war. Although the first night they occupied the front trenches they wanted to answer Jerry's challenge to come out and fight, but they remembered General Alderson's advice to them and stayed put!

After a few preliminary raids on Jerry's lines for prisoners from whom to secure information, a barrage was laid down by the English in the early morning of March 10th, to which the Jerries replied feebly. Then the English infantry rushed from the trenches with such speed that the Germans seemed stunned by the suddenness of the attack, many immediately throwing down their rifles and surrendering, passing down the line in an intermittent stream, followed by some of the Indian army, cheerful in victory. The object of the English attack had been to test the British fighting machine and, if possible, gain Aubersbridge, which dominated

Lille. But, after this brief success, things commenced to go badly, some of the supporting reserves failing to arrive in time, so that the first and second trenches, that had been taken, over a three-mile stretch, were made merely a bait to attract fire from the German third line trenches. The Canadian regiments, however, took no major active part, but did suffer their first baptism of fire and experienced a large-scale (for that period) barrage.

A month later, the Canadians were moved in to take over some trenches on the Ypres salient, little dreaming that before another week had passed, they would have consecrated to Canada for all time, with their blood, this little corner of Flanders. On April 20th the Germans commenced bombing Ypres with large forty-two centimeter guns and gas shells, killing the civilians and children in the most wanton manner and destroying buildings, filling the streets with debris. With the people trying to leave by every means possible, even under this terrific bombardment, the town presented a scene of utter confusion. Invalids and cripples were blocked in their attempts to escape by terrified horses running wild, falling debris, shrapnel and—lack of transportation! The barrage lasted intermittently for 48 hours until the morning of April 22nd, when that sinister quietness that forebodes evil settled over the town.

At five o'clock in the afternoon a new method for death and destruction was adopted as the Germans unleashed their first poison gas attack. From pipes laid and force pumps, the fumes were carried away from below the German parapets by a favorable wind, like a cloud of mist, in the direction of the trenches occupied by the Canadian troops, and the French, but due to the wind veering slightly, most of the gas was carried forward over that section of the trenches held by the French, with the result that they soon began to fall like leaves before an autumn gale, choking and coughing in greatest agony, as they lost all power of resistance through its sudden and deadly action. Those who did not succumb immediately were forced to retreat as best they could. The German Command, in full anticipation of the results, soon followed up the attack with a terrific infantry push, driving the demoralized French back to a depth of two miles behind their front line trenches.

Now, the Canadian troops, realizing what was taking place, soon mustered, charging the aggressors with rifles and bayonets, fighting hand to hand with but one thought that they must conquer the Germans and throw them back. The fight continued through-

out the night, as, by the light of a clouded moon, they bayoneted their way through strongly fortified wood, killing as they went on, till the far side had been reached. Here they at once entrenched themselves, but with the light of day the Jerry artillery pounded their new trenches so badly that they were forced to again evacuate them. They rallied again though—those that were left—and the fighting continued with such ferocity that even to the hardened veteran the battle of Ypres goes down in history as one of the bloodiest of the Great War.

For three days, fighting against great odds, the struggle continued, the Canadians holding out with that British bulldog tenacity against the flower of the German army, the Prussian Guards. Many of them received decorations for outstanding bravery, including Robert, who in the thick of the fight, when machine-gun bullets were flying thick and fast, approached a German redoubt, singlehanded, and crawling within striking distance, bayoneted both its occupants. For this he was awarded the D.S.M. and recommended for a commission.

On the Sunday morning, three days later they were relieved and started back to billets, mustering only one quarter their original strength. Completely fatigued, many slept on their feet as they marched. Robert, although exhausted, had come through with only a few bruises and a cut about two inches long in his forearm from a bayonet thrust which he'd tried to ward off. The scenes on the way back, as they crept along the roadway torn to pieces for several miles near the scenes of fighting around St. Julien, were too horrible to contemplate, for on all sides were dead and dying, whom the stretcher-bearers had so far been too busy to cope with, shattered pieces of human flesh, trenches in which many half-buried still had a spark of life and victims of the gas attacks, their flesh coloured blue and green. Further back from the Line were gruesome rows of dead awaiting burial, while along the roads could be seen dead and crippled animals and apple trees with buds blistered by deadly gas. Pools of water at the side of the road carried the poison-gas scum on their surfaces. Truly a scene of death and desolation!

Billets were finally reached and the tired men fell into their blankets to get relief from torturous and nerve-racking strain in a thirty-six-hour sleep. At noon on Monday General Currie had again received an S.O.S. for reserves and although he knew his men were still tired, he felt obliged to promise they would be

there. So that evening they went in the Line again suffering two days more of strenuous fighting, in which their casualties were quite heavy. They were again relieved, however, and rested in reserve till May 14th, when their head-quarters were moved to a southern section of the British lines. Here, on the 17th, the broken brigades were remade with reinforcements from the Canadian base in England, before going up the Line in front of Festubert, where considerable fighting ensued without any apparent objective in view. The Germans were strongly entrenched here and in some places the opposing trenches were only thirty-five yards apart. This led to a long series of raids and counter-raids and prisoner patrols, in which both sides suffered losses, many of which were caused by concealed snipers.

Robert, mindful of his temperance pledge, at first refused the tot of rum handed out before they went "over the top" in swift, thrusting bayonet attacks, but after skewering a young Jerry, just as he was shouting "Kamerad", he decided that the rum was necessary, if only to dull his sensibilities during such carnage of the devil.

The evening of May 21st saw a heavy barrage laid down by our guns, preceding an attack of several British brigades on the Bexhill redoubt, but they were met by such a machine-gun stream of lead that, on the left flank they were almost annihilated. On the right, though, they managed to gain 200 yards of trench, which they at once started to fortify. but next morning under heavy bombardment they had to abandon it, after suffering heavy casualties.

During this time, Robert, who had not yet been officially commissioned did his job in the ranks. War embittered him and the sight of three of his chums lying out in No-man's-Land, without food or water for three days, one with his leg badly damaged, another shot in the hip and the third crazed from shell-shock, not yet rescuable, did little to make him see anything but the cruelty of war. Two men paid with their lives in a rescue attempt, but they were finally rescued, one of them, however, dying after four days of physical and mental agony.

Truly, such a picture brought home to him an American General's description, "War is Hell."

CHAPTER 32

The most heroic deed in life is not that which is done by daring and courage, before the eyes of men, but that which is accomplished in loving kindness and compassion in an obscure manner.—Nota Bene.

AT ONE o'clock in the afternoon of May 23rd, orders were given to Robert's company that they would, next morning, under Major Edgar, endeavor to take a redoubt which had been holding up the Line's advance. In bright moonlight next morning they accomplished their mission, with heavy losses though, and Robert found himself walking down a stretch of captured trench looking for prisoners hiding in dug-outs. He had only suffered some skin wounds and a deep cut in the right arm from a shovel aimed at his head.

When he noticed a steel door jutting out from the trench wall he opened it carefully, expecting a booby-trap. Inside were two dead Germans, young officers, lying there with blackened faces that concussion leaves. Snuggled up to the bodies was a beautiful German police dog, dead, whilst at its side its puppy lay suffering, but still able to roll its eyes in piteous appeal. For a moment Robert stood thinking of his own collie at home and he thought of a dog's fidelity to man, even in death. At this moment the puppy feebly stretched out its paws as its eyes said plainer than words, "Kamerad". Robert was so touched that he immediately took out his emergency ration from his knapsack, replaced it with the puppy, and then set out to return to his trench, though there were still lots of bullets and pieces of shrapnel flying around. But, through crawling, and hiding in shell holes, he returned without further incident and several hours later found himself in a field-dressing station, having his arm attended to, as he told the story of the puppy he had found, which he then produced from his knapsack. After the doctor and Robert had christened him Kame-rad, the puppy was given some milk from a can and taken by Robert to his camp-cot.

When Robert was sent to the base hospital next day and from

there to England on a two week's leave to Blighty, he left Kamerad in the good care of the nurses till his return.

The next two weeks was spent in London, visiting places of historic interest, and enjoying the generous hospitality; of its war conscious citizens, who invited him and other Canadians to their homes, and other social events. Which made the time pass so quickly, that he was again on a boat bound for France, before he could realize his furlough had been spent; and the grim spectre of killing his fellow man, now lay before him, (The wages of war). Aboard were some two hundred soldiers and nurses, principally, returning to their duties. The boat was delayed in getting away, so that the cold bleak air of the North Sea, even at this season of the year, was quite noticeable.

Just as the first grey streaks of day were seen, panic was caused among all aboard, in varying degrees, when an order from the bridge reported a submarine close by on the port side and ordering all males to stand by the boats. Scarcely was the order received when a torpedo came swirling through the waters, a moment later striking the ship about one quarter of its length back from the stern and blasting a big hole in its side through which water poured with great force. The suddenness seemed too much for the nerve of those brave men who had faced death in so many forms on the battlefields of Flanders, as they rushed on deck where the sailors were already trying to get the boats in position. Others rushed to find those in sleeping quarters, and an S.O.S. call was at once sent out. By the time the first two boats had been lowered, the bow of the ship was up in the air, raised through the weight of water in the stern. This created further alarm and several jumped into the water, grabbing what support they could. Another torpedo narrowly missed the ship and by this time several other boats holding men and women in varied apparel had by this time reached the water.

Robert, who from the beginning of the trip had been discussing many phases of the war with several other English Tommies, who were desirous of getting a colonial viewpoint, jumped to his feet as he felt the impact and a moment later was rushing up on deck when an aged lady with heavy eyes that revealed many sleepless nights, halted him with her feeble hand to ask what had made the boat rock. He stayed with her while he calmed her fears and then, when the first call to the life boats came, he carried her over and placed her in one. She thanked him for his kindness

during those minutes when death had been so close. Three other hysterical women had, meanwhile, jumped, before they were caught.

By this time a haze of mist had spread over the water like an enveloping curtain, hiding from sight that dastardly and treacherous crime of man. In answer to the S.O.S., one of His Majesty's convoy ships had dropped back to stand by, causing the submarine to submerge quickly. Thirty minutes after the attack, all passengers and crew with the exception of seventeen who had jumped overboard and had sunk from sight in the chilling waters, were pursuing their journey to their destination, such clothing as could be secured being given to them. Robert again had met the old lady who again thanked him for his care, as she told him she was on her way to France to see her only son who was not expected to recover from wounds received two days before.

Landed at a French base, Robert reported to headquarters for duty, where he received several letters from his wife, Sandy and his parents and he spent the morning reading and re-reading them till they were almost memorized. At the hospital he found Kamerad had received the best of care for which he offered his thanks in a tangible way, only to be told it was "all in the day's duty", with such a winsome smile that he knew there was no alternative.

On inspection next morning he received two pleasant surprises and at least a temporary respite from trench war, for he was commissioned captain and along with 25 others, who had some knowledge, was given the opportunity to take up aerial training for work in the Field.

Three days later he was in a beautiful section of southern France commencing a four months' course at the hands of both English and French experts. The first two months passed without any untoward incident, but in the third month with pilots badly needed, he was taken up for his first try-out as pilot. At first he had that "all-gone" feeling at the pit of his stomach and was somewhat dizzy too, as his instructor called different orders to him. After the third trip he began to enjoy it, in a new world of beauty and peace, away from savagery and Hellishness of war. During the following month he learned all the tricks and turns then known in aerial navigation and throughout his entire training he showed such skill and daring as brought him his wings as pilot fairly easily. After six months' training, with the war showing unmistakable signs of stretching out over the winter and longer, it was

considered necessary to get considerable topographical work done from the air, including pictures of enemy ammunition depot dumps, army reserves, camps, etc., so that on November 25th, Robert was assigned as pilot for this work and at once left for air headquarters not far from the Front. For the next two months he carried on this work, several times crossing into the enemy's territory and having frequent narrow escapes from being shot down by anti-air craft guns and enemy planes. He had but one accident that caused him any real alarm and that was when, returning from a tour of enemy supply dumps with an artist-photographer, and running low on gas, he had barely passed over his own Line before he had to put the plane down fast, tearing one wing. Neither he or the artist was hurt and the sketches and photographs obtained fully compensated for the loss sustained.

The next trip was to be for Robert, had he known it, almost fatal. The day after Nancy had been bombarded by long range guns, January 2nd, 1916, Robert, with two other pilots, was ordered to go up with photographers to try and locate the guns, bombing them if possible. This necessitated going far into enemy territory, so planes to carry more gas but with less speed, were chosen.

Robert failed to locate the guns but dropped bombs on a large ammunition depot, which they photographed. They then turned and were heading for home when they ran into a bunch of the enemy's speedy type scouting planes, which kept up a continuous hail of lead at Robert's plane and the one on his right, sending it plummeting to earth, with only a fiery streak to mark its passing. This caused Robert to shout through his speaking tube to the artist to get their own gun in readiness. The artist, a good marksman, was now in readiness as Robert continued to give his plane all possible speed. A German machine was now making a detour with the intention of coming back, face to face, with Robert but as he figured out this play he decided to continue his course until within about three hundred yards and then drop quickly below before Jerry had a chance at broadside fire. However, another plane came up on his tail in the meantime and peppering his plane, finally got his artist—killing him outright. Robert, almost unconsciously, hooked his belt to the parachute and disconnected the one to the seat, determining to sell his life as dearly as possible by speeding headlong into the other plane that now seemed like some great dragon with its mouth open to snap out the spark of

life. The moment he noted the deflecting angle of the enemy's plane he headed his plane directly in its path, the impact being so terrific that both machines buckled up like eggshells as they fell to earth.

However, it was the means of throwing Robert clear and with the parachute mercifully opening like a pair of saving wings, he soared gracefully to earth, but unconscious of all that was taking place, his right eye and side of his face being badly injured in the impact. Some minutes later after the two machines had fallen, Robert's was only a burning pyre, while he landed in the limbs of an apple tree in a garden. He was soon noticed by its owner, who hearing the crackling of the burning plane rushed out of her home, but as she saw two men in a plane and another in a tree, she decided she needed help and rushed about a block up the street to get the pastor of the little parish, Robert learned afterwards. Back she came with him and with the use of a ladder soon had Robert on the ground, trying to revive him. After noting he was breathing freely, the pastor then turned his attention to the two men in the other plane, whom he saw at once from their clothing were Germans.

Meanwhile, the old lady was trying first-aid on Robert, who she at once noted wore an English flying suit. Further, on opening his coat collar to help his breathing she noted some letters fall out of his pocket bearing Canadian stamps, which she at once recognized as being the same kind as were on the letters from her grandson, who always spoke in such glowing terms of his Canadian friends. She must take care of this poor boy, she decided. She then hurried over to where the pastor, a man of middle age, was standing in silent contemplation as he thought how quickly and in such appalling ways so many young lives were being snuffed out, plunged into eternity, without any chance of making peace with God.

The old lady of sixty years, Mrs. Schmidt, roused him quickly as she grasped him by the arm, saying, "That boy is still living over there and he is a Canadian," trying to impress him by showing the letters. That is good news," he replied, "as these boys are beyond any aid we can give them." As she looked over to them, with a look of deep sympathy, she said, "Poor boys, and all for the love of the Fatherland." Then as if a sudden inspiration had come to her mind, she said, "As there is very little we can do for them, it is all the more reason we should try and do something for this other

poor boy, so far from home, and no doubt some mother's spirit of love is now hovering over him." At this the Rev. August Koenburg said, "Yes, we must give him attention immediately," but as they turned to go, she stopped him saying, "But, if the authorities learn he is a Canadian, which they soon will, they will take him away to some prison camp, where he will possibly receive very little care. We must protect him if we can. I have an idea. Could we not take the clothing of that officer and exchange it for his and leave him lying near the other plane that now only is a piece of burned wreckage?" At this Rev. Koenburg replied, that would not be right, it would be deception and if the authorities learned of it, we might get into serious trouble." At this the old lady replied, "That may be the law of our country, but there is a greater law which says, 'Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.' Therefore, in the sight of God, it is our duty, whether it appears or not to be deception, to do the best we can to protect this boy and allay his sufferings."

Recognizing her sincerity and the truth of her words, the pastor said, "You are right. But how will we proceed?" Mrs. Schmidt replied, "I will go to the house and get the bed ready and bring back something to use for a stretcher. In the meantime, you can change their clothing as they are almost the same size. If it were not for their disfigurements from injury I would say they were very much alike in appearance." She hurried away while the pastor attended to his part of the arrangement and had just about completed his work when Mrs. Schmidt and one of her granddaughters, who was living with her, Bertha, a handsome young girl of eighteen, helped to carry him in on a big blanket.

This had all been accomplished in less than thirty minutes from the time the plane had fallen in the garden. Mrs. Schmidt felt that no one should know and that their secret could be kept as very few people had witnessed the thrilling combat. Now, with Robert in bed and a famous German Ace in his clothes, near where the plane had fallen, Bertha was sent out to make the news known, so that before another hour had passed, the garden was full of curious thrillseekers asking questions. They only learned that a man had been burned to death in the English plane. By this time the authorities had arrived and taken charge. The doctor arrived and attended to the supposed famous German Ace, Von Mackensen.

At first, he was about to give orders that he be taken to a hospital in a distant town, but on the request of Mrs. Schmidt and her two grand-daughters, who had plenty of time for nursing him, and would appreciate doing so much for the Fatherland, it was decided he should remain and with the large bandage around his eye and forehead, it would have been difficult for anyone not knowing the two men to have told them apart. The supposed English fliers, however, were given a funeral with German military honors, the authorities believing them to be the bodies of hated Englishmen. In this way, the secret remained with the parson and Mrs. Schmidt. For several days the story of the aerial duel was headline news in several of the big papers, but was then forgotten as new war news trickled through. The authorities, however, kept in touch with the doctor as to the progress of the patient who was looked upon as one of their leading aces, having a record of bringing down some twenty-seven enemy planes.

Three days passed with Robert under the efficient care of Mrs. Schmidt and Bertha. The other grand-daughter, also making her home there owing to war conditions, was of a more serious and questioning disposition. Not knowing the secret she paid little attention to the patient. On the third day, as Bertha was busily engaged bathing his forehead wound, he regained consciousness almost instantly, and looking into her face, said, "Where am I? Where am I?" to which she replied in a voice filled with sympathy "At home", at which a smile encircled his face as he again sank back on the pillows and went off to sleep.

CHAPTER 33

Virtue which has never been attacked by temptation is deserving of no monument.—Nota Bene.

THE following day Robert had regained full consciousness apparently, for as Bertha entered the room with her blonde tresses, roguish blue eyes, and the sweetest expression Robert believed he had ever seen if his mind was still capable of judging, he looked up into her face and asked, "Where am I? How did I get here anyhow?" Speaking perfect English with soft German inflections, she said, smilingly, "I guess it is all due to the fairies." At this he tried to laugh but the shooting pain in his head reminded him of his injuries there. He was about to further question her, when the grandmother made her appearance and pleased at her patient's progress, asked Bertha to make him some coffee. As she hurried away she wondered innocently how the famous German Ace came to speak such good English.

Alone with Robert, his hostess and nurse introduced herself as Mrs. Adolphe Schmidt, and then told him of all that had taken place, which he now remembered so well up to the time of his determined act to crash. She said she wanted to help him regain his health, because of what Canadians had done for her grandson who never grew weary in extolling their praises. She then explained her great anxiety about the secret, warning him he must not give it away by talking in English when strangers were around or even her other grand-daughter, Katrina, who since the loss of her husband had taken a bitter dislike to the English. Robert told her he would do whatever she asked in the matter and would try to make sounds indicating injury to his vocal cords if questioned. As he pressed her hand he said, "I can never thank you enough for what you have done and are doing!"

She then told him that she had lived at this quiet secluded spot for many years. It was on the shore of Lake Wundersohn, she said, many tourists had come to her home every summer before the terrible war to spend their holidays. From them, she and her

youngest grand-daughter, who had spent every summer helping her, had learned much of the English language and customs. Her own daughter, the mother of the two girls and three grandsons, had died about a year and a half ago. Their father had been dead for some years, and the three boys were now in the army, having been drafted shortly after the terrible war commenced. August, who had been her favorite, had been for a few years in Canada and had told her so many interesting stories of its great open spaces and the open-heartedness of its people. She said that she herself had been greatly influenced by his enthusiasm. Her eldest grand-daughter also made her home with them, having lost her husband in the terrible battle of Ypres.

Just then the door was opened by the same girl he had spoken to, wearing the same cheery smile and carrying a tray with steaming coffee and several plates containing plain but tasty home-cooking. As she approached, the grandmother turning to her in the good old-fashioned way, said, "Mr. —" then hesitating as if she could not think what to say, Robert interrupted with, "Call me Von for short," at which she continued, "Mr. Von, this is my grand-daughter, Bertha, who I trust will not forget to attend to your wants." By this time Bertha had placed the tray on the bed and offered her hand in such a friendly manner that the coldest disposition could not but have felt the thrill and warmth given in that handshake. This convinced Robert more conclusively than any discussion ever could, of the magnetic power of sex attraction, for now, removed only a few days from a state of coma, a feeling of love had stirred his feelings for this healthy, robust, country girl, whose facial beauty matched her perfectly formed body. She was a modern Venus, with "it" added and dressed in a fancy-patterned gingham dress. To him, no fairy princess could have looked more alluring, and during the two weeks he remained in bed, he questioned himself many times trying to determine whether his attraction to this girl was real or the result of the nervous condition he was in from the shock and accident? Once he was up and around, it seemed to reach a more acute stage, for at times he was tempted to take her in his arms and tell her of the passionate love she had stirred within him on the many walks they had taken together.

Sandy's words to him in discussing love that great love only comes once in life, was all bosh! A safety valve, however, was found in her sister, who had never seen him until he was up and

around. On meeting her in the kitchen for the first time, her grandmother introduced her as Katrina, but she merely acknowledged him with a flicker of the eye and left the room. Mrs. Schmidt, as if to excuse the girl's action, reminded him of her story, stating that Katrina laid the death of her husband at the door of the Canadians. She had become very embittered with life and against all the British forces, owing to continually brooding over her loss.

As Robert's health improved, Mrs. Schmidt found more time for friendly conversation with him and he told her a great deal about Canada, and his experience. His interesting background, the fact that he did many duties around the home, and the strong religious convictions he had made known, made him a favorite also with the pastor, even if he could not converse in his tongue, conversations being often carried on through Bertha or Mrs. Schmidt, who looked upon him as an exemplary type of man. She showed also that she favored the growing interest between him and Bertha. He had not informed them that he was a married man, satisfying his conscience by telling himself that he would be there only a few weeks possibly before the authorities would imprison him, and that it would not be right to bar them both from such innocent pleasure.

Two months had passed when the specialist who had been attending him made his final examination to see if Robert's speech had returned and if the injured eye was improving. As there proved to be no improvement of the voice and but little in the eye, several forms were filled out and he was ordered to go to Cologne in a week's time for a more thorough examination. This was bad news to Robert, not only because he felt his secret would become known, but more particularly because he feared the effect of such an exposure on his benefactress, so he at once commenced to lay plans to meet the emergency. But in the midst of this worry, he lost no opportunity to spend many happy hours with Bertha. Almost the last was spent with her and her grandmother at the little Lutheran church, but a quarter of a mile distant from the house. They had returned and after supper Bertha sat down beside Robert on the sofa and commenced to show him a boxful of family pictures, while her grandmother sat in a rocking chair nearby to live over again the memories the pictures would revive. About half of them had been shown when Bertha handing him a large picture said, "This is one of my oldest brother, August, taken in

Canada when he was a member of what he called a hockey team." Robert's ears pricked up at once and no sooner had he looked at it than he said, 'Oh, my God, can this be possible?' for he was holding a picture of the Badger hockey team, taken after the members had purchased their first new outfits! After his first surprise had passed, he told them the picture's history, pointing to himself and asking if they could recognize him, which they quickly did. He then commenced asking them questions about August, whom he had known as Carl Freiburg, August, he was told, was his second name. Then they all started talking at once. When it was definitely established that her grandson, Carl August Freiburg, was one of Robert's best friends, Mrs. Schmidt felt she had been divinely guided in doing as she had in saving Robert's life. He was then told how August had arrived only a week before his mother had passed away in July, 1914. August had been so happy to get home in time. His mother had died with a prayer of thanks for his return on her lips.

"After her death", Mrs. Schmidt related, August spent some time visiting many of his old friends, among whom was Ruthe Kreller, an old sweetheart of school days. The early passion was renewed again more strongly than ever, for in two weeks they announced they would be married before he returned to Canada, about the fifth of August. Preparations were going on, when all at once, due to war talk, all passports were cancelled at the end of July. Although he used every argument to gain his liberty, claiming Canadian citizenship, it was no good," she continued, "and not only was there no wedding but he was soon drafted into the German army and is somewhere in those frightful trenches, now fighting against his friends and the country he loves so dearly. Since then, both his brothers have been called up, thus necessitating their sisters, my two grand-daughters here to make their home with me, which, of course, I enjoy very much."

The rest of the pictures were then shown, among which was one of Bertha taken a year before, which Robert begged for to place in his watch, and another of a threshing scene in which he had been one of the crew. Finally, Mrs. Schmidt found it was her bedtime and said, "Now that I feel we know one another so much better I think I can leave Bertha as your hostess and I shall go to bed." It now struck Robert that the new relationship established placed him in a delicate position. He could not play the part of a cad and leave this home with any stigma of dishonor. He must be

above board and tell Bertha the whole truth. As she sat down beside him again she said, "It seems wonderful Mr. Von, that you are August's friend, whom he mentioned so often after he came home!" As her eyes showed devotion and affection for him, he thought, Robert found it impossible to restrain his feelings any longer, and as his arms went about her and his lips met hers in a lingering kiss, he said, "Yes Bertha, it is only too true, but no truer than the fact that I love you with a love I feel will ever be like coals of fire in my heart! I also have to make you a confession though that until now I have not had the courage to do, for fear this short walk through what has been like Paradise to me would be ended. You see, dear one, I am not in a position to reciprocate your love freely, for I am a married man." He then gave her some general details of his married life, but she quickly interrupted, saying, "It seems I know all about you, so much that I want to call you Bobbie instead of Mr. Von. No matter what your position is in life, I am satisfied to share with you the love that came into my heart that first day I saw you after grandmother had washed away the blood on your face, before the surgeon had come. There seemed to be such a sweet smile on your lips and in your eyes."

"All I can remember, as I rushed headlong into what I thought would be instant death, was breathing a prayer to God to have mercy on me!" He then told her of plans he had been considering of trying to make the German trenches by leaving two days before he was due to go to Cologne, thinking that with the papers and uniform of the German pilot he was supposed to be, whose work had received such high official praise, that he would get through without much questioning especially as he would still wear the large bandage about his head. From there he would try to make the British lines. At first she would not hear of him taking such a chance, but when he mentioned that by remaining, in all likelihood, he would be imprisoned, she agreed that there seemed to be no other alternative. Within the shelter of each other's arms, it seemed impossible that earthly powers could so quickly destroy all that meant so much to them, but another official notice arrived the following morning, advising him to report, as already instructed. Robert at once concluded that he must leave the following day so every moment almost was spent in careful planning.

His last evening, Robert accompanied by Bertha and Grandmother Schmidt went to say good-bye to the parson, thanking him

for all his services. On returning he expressed his thanks to Mrs. Schmidt, who struggling with her emotions said, "God be with you, my son, and may it please Him to allow you to return when peace has again blessed our land, which I trust will be very soon."

It then remained for him to give what parting words of comfort he could to Bertha. As they had so much to say to each other, the hours in each other's arms, making plans to bring them together again, passed quickly, till at last daylight reminded them they had much to do. Robert had to get his things together for the trip and Bertha had to make him up a large lunch that would last him till he had put his proposed plan into effect. After a hearty breakfast and a last fond embrace, Robert left to enter on yet another phase of his life. His idea in leaving so early was to get on his way before its inhabitants would know he was gone, for he had become a familiar figure as Mr. Von.

The first part of the journey consisted of walking some miles to a small railway centre, where he took train to a small city several hours journey further on. Here he changed to a train taking him nearer to the reserve lines. Nothing untoward happened during the entire trip except on one occasion, on meeting some officers he failed to give the the proper acknowledgement. However, he covered his error quickly, raising no suspicion. Nearing the reserve trenches that evening he was challenged by the sentries, but his papers quickly passed him without further questioning. Reaching a spot he estimated to be within a couple of miles of the reserve trenches, he noticed some wooded land in which he hid and soon, due to lack of sleep, worry and excitement, he was asleep, never waking till the sun was high in the heavens the next morning.

After partaking of some food, thinking of Bertha as he ate, he walked to a tree he saw some distance away, near the edge of the wood, and climbing it he saw on the right what looked to be a regular canvas city of reserve troops and supplies, while on a ridge straight ahead was, what he believed to be a second or third line reserve trench. He puzzled on how best he could enter those safely-guarded precincts, but the more he thought of his lack of German, the more he decided he was liable to be captured as a spy and shot. He must wait till a better plan suggested itself, he decided. During that afternoon he noted big preparations being made, apparently for a big drive as huge trucks went by, loaded with men and supplies of various kinds. This gave him his needed

idea. If a drive took place he could reach the reserve trenches by the time the drive was on and in the rush and excitement that would prevail, join in the movement up to the front line without much likelihood of being either noticed or questioned.

The plan was left at this and another day sped by till at twelve o'clock at night, he was suddenly awakened from sleep by the resounding echoes of heavy artillery fire. At once he was up and he proceeded quickly to the road he had noted on his right, which he followed to what, from his observation, he had judged to be a reserve trench. Hitting its communication lines he found it led to the second line, where everything appeared to be in readiness for a big push. Seeing a shovel standing at one side, he picked it up in case he might require it for protection, and proceeded a short distance further, when he noted a rather large hole in the trench wall caused by loose earth falling in. Being dark, he decided this would be a good place to remain. Taking off his big coat to be in readiness, he rolled it up and put it high on his back to make it look like a knapsack. He had not long to wait, for a few minutes the whole sky was illuminated with flares and star shells along a several miles front. The advance order was then given that was to further bring death and destruction to his friends and possibly comrades who had not already succumbed to the first artillery fire. The next fifteen minutes the struggle swayed back and forth in a series of hand to hand fights and several times the Germans were driven back to their second line by the heroic British on the other side. It was during one of the German pushes in which several shock companies were being rushed forward that Robert decided his best opportunity had arrived, and he was soon in the midst of the fighting with a gun he had taken from a fallen soldier. This he used with the same daring courage he had done in the battle of Ypres, accounting for several Jerries rushing forward beside him. During a momentary lull he ran toward a shell hole where he had seen in the light of a flare, a couple of his own countrymen lying, with the idea of getting a coat from them, to make sure he would not be mistaken for a Jerry when he tried to gain his own trench. But, at that instant, a shell from the British guns dropped short and exploded just in front of him, the concussion being so great that it knocked him backwards. But even as he fell he automatically covered his ears, guarding his hearing. Partly buried in the earth, he lay unconscious as the tide of battle still continued to sway back and forward. His first return to conscious-

ness came with the realization that something had caught his arm and was pulling it with jerks.

Opening his eyes he was suddenly alert as he saw near him what he thought he recognized as his faithful dog, Kamerad. He called Kamerad and at the mention of his name, the dog went into a frenzy, rushing to Robert's head, licking his face in a way that denoted great pleasure. Quickly the dog went from one arm to the other, each time pulling his master about a foot further back from the German line and toward the British. He was soon observed by a couple of stretcher-bearers and in a few moments was in the British line, being carried down to a casualty clearing station with Kamerad bringing up the procession. By this time the German drive gave every evidence of being a decided failure, each side falling back to their partly smashed trenches, while the stretcher-bearers continued the grim work of picking up dead and wounded.

Robert, still suffering from shock, was transferred on down to a field hospital, Kamerad still following. Here he told, after his injuries had been carefully attended to, and had given his name, particulars of his flying crash and all that had taken place since his fateful trip into Germany, that he had been posted as "missing" and then "dead", after the report of the other pilot who had escaped from the Germans only to land in Denmark when short of gas, had been received. He was then told that when it was evident he would not return, some of his brother officers, who knew of Kamerad's intelligence and training, had turned him over to the dispatch service. This explained his presence up the British front line. Robert then told the manner in which Kamerad had rescued him from the shell hole.

After some further conversation Robert received a large bundle of letters that had been received during the time he had been in Germany. The two last received were from Betty, expressing the great worry that the sad news of his being missing had given her, but not knowing the word "missing" was often used as an alibi for death in some unknown form, her letter showed how implicit her faith was that he was still safe. If he received her letter, she wrote, would he write her without fail? This he did and also his family and Sandy.

CHAPTER 34

*True emotions and sincere words never perish.
The great heart of humanity gladly receives
and embalms every true utterance of the hum-
blest of its offspring.—Nota Bene.*

IN two weeks Robert had sufficiently recovered to return to flying headquarters, where he was given an examination with the idea of again continuing his work in the service. But, to his disappointment it was found his eye had been too badly affected from the injury he had sustained to allow this. It was suggested he take a short vacation before reporting again. This he had decided to do when an officer of the Engineers, learning his record, told him he was looking for men with sufficient experience to properly direct this work. Robert promised to think it over, and next day he decided he would accept the offer.

Two days later, he was to find himself in command of fifty men, forming a corps of Canadian Engineers, now stationed a short way from St. Eloi. One of the number was Michael O'Hara, a big good-natured Irishman, over six feet in height, a most popular son from the land of the Shamrock, and who, previous to his enlistment, had spent two years in the R.C.M.P. with headquarters in northern British Columbia. Robert at once struck up a friendship with him that was to stand him in good stead through many hazards that he met in his work. The parting with his faithful friend, Kamerad, was the hardest part he felt in accepting the work, but he realized how difficult it would be to take care of him, and the great value he was to the despatch service, so he let him go back to that section.

The new work was one requiring considerable heroism in rebuilding roads, making maps, and laying out trenches, under all sorts of conditions, many times under heavy shell-fire. A few days after Robert had commenced to get everything working smoothly, their observation balloons reported that large concentrations of troops and supplies were being made back of the enemy's lines, indicating a new drive was impending. This came three days later with the usual heavy barrage as a warning but the attack was so

strongly repulsed that the British and Canadian troops were able to make a counter-attack, and wishing to follow up the advantage gained, called for bridges to be laid in order to get several field pieces across a small stream to a commanding knoll overlooking the enemy trenches.

This work being entrusted to Robert, he barely had his men nicely started on the work, when the enemy realizing their intentions laid down another barrage, followed by massed formations of infantry, which seemed to sweep everything before them. The bridge had to be abandoned, but with the answering withering fire from Canadian machine-guns, the enemy had to withdraw several companies, used, though, to make another attack against the other side of the salient that had been formed. A desperate hand-to-hand fight ensued, in which several of Robert's men with Mike O'Hara in the lead, tried to clear a German trench in which many of its defenders were using heavy shovels. Mike grappled with a big Prussian, who was no match for his prowess, as the shovel he held was quickly wrenched from his hand and with an uppercut to the jaw he was sent reeling back into the trench.

Robert, who had slipped as he landed in the enemy's trench, had just managed to regain a kneeling position, when he saw swinging down to his head a heavy shovel, but before it could land a bayonet, with lightning-like velocity passed above him, catching the shovel-wielder in the fleshy part of the right forearm, causing him to drop it as if it had been charged with electricity. With a look of surprise, he saw that Mike had been his saviour. Now standing for a moment expecting the shovel-wielder would be at him again, and himself defenceless, he looked closely at the man, just as he cried out, "Robert, my God, my God!" At this Robert, astounded at meeting in such a terrible situation said, "Carl, is it possible we should meet like this? Lead the way to a dugout quickly." Each knew the danger they were in with rifles cracking, and big guns booming, but they quickly found a dugout where they fell into each others arms too filled with emotion to speak, as death stalked around them. At last, Carl, finding his voice, feebly said, "How could life be so cruel as to bring us together in such a murderous orgy? How did you ever come to be here?"

As briefly as possible Robert told his story and how fate had already taken him to Carl's own home, where he had been told his story by his grandmother and sister Bertha, a girl whom he could never forget. He then showed him the picture he was carrying.

He was about to give him further news from home, when a bugle call sounded the German retreat. At this Robert said, "Carl, for your own good, I must make you a prisoner, with but one idea in mind, that will be to get you away from all this." Carl hesitated at first, as he loved the Fatherland, but with Robert rising to go, he jumped to his side as another thought flashed through his mind, "Is Canada not my adopted country?" he asked, as he stepped ahead and was marched back by Robert to the Canadian trench, a prisoner in appearance but a freeman in thought knowing he could rely on Robert.

Here he met many more of his countrymen and was sent down the Line, but not before Robert had reported the special details of his case, asking he be given his liberty and allowed to proceed to his farm. This was arranged and before harvest he was back on his farm, while Robert had the knowledge that he had been able to partly discharge the great obligation he felt he was under to Mrs. Schmidt and Bertha for all they had done for him.

CHAPTER 35

"The Soul that perpetually overflows with kindness and sympathy will always be cheerful."

—Parke Godwin.

Two days after the determined drive had been so valiantly checked by the heroism of the men who took part in the battle to become known as St. Eloi, a ten-day leave was granted to those who had fought in it. Initiated by Mike, a move was soon made to organize a trip to Paris, and although he felt dubious as to the benefits the boys might get from such a jaunt, Robert finally agreed. When they arrived in Paris Mike and Robert found themselves paired together and visited many of its famous pleasure spots, not forgetting Bel Tabarin, which they entered one evening, not lured by its questionable reputation so much as in the wish to forget the horrors of war.

They had but nicely seated themselves at one of the many tables in booths, when a wine clerk approached. Before they had a chance to give an order, two of the lady entertainers came towards the table, with inviting expressions on their faces. One was a brunette and the other a blonde. Both had been beautiful, but now showed evidences of a dissipated life. Mike at once rose to greet them and invited them to join their party, but the blonde, reminding Robert of the one he had met before several years ago in Demoralburg, did not particularly arouse his interest. In justice to Mike, however, Robert had to keep his end up, so he endeavoured to be at least friendly toward the girls. The brunette, smilingly, introduced herself as Yvonne and her friend as Lucinda, in such good English that Mike heartily responded by saying, "Call me Mike, and my very good friend here, Robert." At this they all smiled in pleasant manner. The drinks were then served, Mike getting a large bottle of his favorite Guinness blend, and Robert and the girls drinking Cognac. Robert found himself paired off with Lucinda and was soon listening to the story of her adult life. She was of English-Swedish parentage, while Yvonne was pure French. Both had come from good homes, but due to the circumstances of war had become victims of its spell, enjoying its

excitement and luxury and drink, gradually falling into a life of dissipation.

Many times, however, the thought had come to their minds to get away from it all, Lucinda said, but they had never found enough willpower to enable them to actually do so. Robert felt he wanted to ask Lucinda why she didn't make some effort to abandon her present way of living. As he didn't want to enter into a sermonette, and also feeling his conscience reproaching him for having partaken of three large drinks of cognac, he compromised by saying, "I think I understand, but still you could make to-day the day of Salvation."

He then suggested that they take chairs closer to the music, which they did. During this time Mike had become quite interested in Yvonne, already calling her his little French Colleen, and when she suggested a dance, he was immediately enthused and led her into the steps of a dreamy waltz, then being played. They dated the girls for the next two evenings before leaving, and actually spent a lot of their leave in their company, enjoying it to the full.

On the fourth morning after their arrival, they decided to visit a large military hospital in the suburbs to visit a friend of Mike's, badly wounded with shrapnel. They were walking down a crowded street enroute to the station to catch a suburban train, when several heavily loaded transport waggon loaded with supplies and drawn by a caterpillar engine was noticed coming along at a too rapid speed for their load. When the engine was almost opposite them, Mike made a sudden dash on to the street, having seen a little girl in her thoughtless play, rushing directly in front of it. Knowing the driver would have no chance to stop till it was too late he grasped the little one and swung her on to the boulevard, just in the nick of time, but not soon enough to avoid getting caught himself by the engine and having one of his feet badly jammed and lacerated by the tractor.

It had all happened so quickly that Robert could hardly believe his own eyes as he rushed over to Mike lying there, surrounded by a crowd of gesticulating French men and women. The crowd was so great that the street was rapidly becoming blocked, while the mother of the little girl tried so hard to express her thanks. At the hospital it was soon learned that there were no bones broken except the big toe, but the foot had been so badly crushed that it would be some weeks before he could be able to use it

again. When Mike was told this, he at once said to Robert, "Well, you have to call around as usual and see my little colleen." Robert assured him it would be done, and as the time came for him to leave, he promised also to return to the hospital next morning.

Once away from the hospital Robert was heart-sick, and if it had not been for his promise to his friend, he was tempted to shake the dust of the city from his feet, for here amidst all kinds of pleasure and gaiety, one still found trials, afflictions and death. Truly a great city, but unless one had friends could be the most lonesome place in the world. That evening, in accordance with his promise he was again at Bel Tabarin and on meeting the two girls at once informed them of Mike's accident. They were stunned by the news and showed by their sympathy that although they were officially case-hardened goldiggers, their hearts were filled with the maternal instinct of love and compassion. When Robert left they asked him to call for them next morning so they could go to the hospital with him.

Next morning at ten o'clock when they ordinarily would have been catching up on their sleep, they were up and waiting with two large bouquets of flowers and a large box from the delicatessen store. Robert was greatly surprised at the kindly interest they were showing in his friend on such a short and cursory acquaintance and again was forcibly reminded that Sandy had said that many women who were leading scarlet lives did not do so from choice, but through environment and an inherent desire they had not been educated to control. Mike's own mother could not have walked in and stroked Mike's hair in a more kindly manner than they did or have offered more cheery sympathy. They further promised to visit him every morning till he was able to get around again. This promise they most faithfully fulfilled and Robert went with them on each visit as long as his leave permitted. On his last day before going back to the hell of the trenches, he said good-bye to Mike and then thanked the girls for their extreme kindness to and care of his friend.

CHAPTER 36

"Affliction is the school in which great virtues are acquired, in which great characters are formed."—Hannah More.

THAT afternoon Robert was speeding by fast train through a scenic portion of northern France that had not yet suffered the terrible ravages of war, and the peaceful-looking homes stood out in great contrast to those he had seen so often in other sections of the country and of the type he would soon see again. As the train came within range of the enemy's big guns, he was obliged to disembark, taking transport to the communication trenches, which would take him to his outfit up the Line. Riding in the transport, he couldn't help but realize more than ever the terrible destruction wrought by the high-powered guns of both sides, with whole villages levelled to the ground, churches where the word of God had been revered for ages, now nothing but a bloody shambles and cemeteries with the dead blown from their graves. He remembered the scene in one church-yard, which had temporarily become a section of the British Line, when it had been captured and recaptured seven times one Sunday, with the graves being blown to shreds while the customary ornamental iron image of Jesus on the Cross had looked down on the embattled scene! And the rows upon rows of wooden crosses with here and there a blood-red poppy peeping up, made him wonder again why God permitted such carnage!

At the entrance to the communication trenches he found several of the members of his party who had gone to Paris also, and on their enquiry had to tell them of Mike's accident, not forgetting to speak of his heroism, too. He was then given several letters, five of them being from Betty. They betrayed so much agony of soul and so much fear for his well-being, although she had tried to appear courageous, that Robert immediately sat down and wrote her a cheery letter. In it, as he scribbled on with a piece of board for a table and a candle for light, he told her about Mike and the trip to Paris, omitting mention of his dangerous work and the narrow escapes from death he had had. Perhaps it was presentiment

or intuition that caused him to dispatch his answers so quickly. Who can tell?

The action on this section of the Line having settled down to the odd trench raid, the Engineers were not kept so busy and Robert's work was thus confined to having his men straighten out portions of the trenches and do some repair work on the road used for bringing up ammunition. On the eighth day news came down from the Front that the redoubt known as Hill Thirty-four was to be mined and a detachment of Engineers was needed. So, on the following day Robert took fifteen of his men and reported there for duty. The task required a lot of arduous and careful work, because the enemy must not be allowed to detect the tunnelling and mining with their special sound machines, for if they did many lives would be imperilled. After a week of heavy digging, and carrying out the earth, placing it along the parapets for some hundred yards, everything was in readiness for placing the mine. It was arranged this would be carried out the following morning, at six o'clock, with a covering attack by the British Infantry on the trenches surrounding the hill.

The morning dawned bright and fair and long before the zero hour, Robert with two other men had gone to place the mine, which would mean destruction of this strong redoubt and death to its German defenders, but, the German appeared to know that an attempted push was to be made, and at twenty minutes to six they laid down a heavy barrage on the English trenches. At this time Robert, with two of his men was deep down in the earth, setting the mine, ignorant of the stunt the Jerries were pulling off. Having accomplished their work they were about to return to the outside again to set off the fuse at the appointed time, when a big shell exploded in the sap, filling it full of earth and thus shutting off any chance of escape for them. Faced with this undreamed of horror, for no form of death can create more terror, the two with Robert commenced to rave and tear their hair, while sobbing for deliverance from what appeared to be an agonizing death while Robert, who felt through his many deliveries that the hand of God was protecting him, tried to offer them consolation by saying that God could open a way, but they must have faith. He then asked them to join him in prayer, which they did, immediately falling upon their knees and repeating the words after him:

"Most merciful and loving Father in Heaven, who knows the trials and pitfalls of life, and who has promised in Thy word of

truth that if we call upon Thy name in the hour of trouble, Thou wilt safely protect us with Thy gracious power, we now humbly before Thy throne of grace ask Thy protecting power and blessing to rest upon us, and to save us from the horrors of impending death that hovers before us, so that we may again return to the arms of those whom we love and cherish. This we ask in the . . . ,” but before the final words could be spoken, a detonation, like a volcano in eruption, was heard as a last remembrance, as the heavily-charged mine blew practically the whole top of the hill away, carrying many of the enemy to unmade graves. But, due to some unaccounted-for freak in the action of the discharge, Robert and one of his men were thrown with several great chunks of earth, about three hundred yards away from the great hole that was now to be seen. To all appearances they were dead, and there they remained during some three hours of desperate fighting that followed. During this time, the English troops obtained possession of a good part of the salient, but were unable to drive the enemy from their trenches. The German stretcher-bearers, picking up their wounded, came across the bodies of Robert and his helper and were about to give them up for dead when one of them noticed Robert’s eyes partly fluttering weakly. Upon investigating more closely they found that they were both still living, so they decided they would take them back to the dressing station in case the officers thought it worth while to try and bring them around to get what information they could concerning what had taken place.

Several hours later, they were taken to different hospitals so that they never saw one another again. Here it was found that Robert, besides suffering from terrible shock, had a broken arm and several bad bruises as though they had been caused from great pressure. He was at once given careful attention but, during the next ten days, he was never known to open his eyes, during which time learned doctors and professors visited him to observe the workings of his nervous system after suffering such a death-defying experience. They wondered how a man could live through such an ordeal and really doubted he would come out of his coma. But, after the first three days, as he was afterwards told, his heart beats became quite normal, and during the period of unconsciousness, his subconscious mind must have commenced to work as he was given a vision so real that nothing but a close approach to death, he thought afterwards, could have produced it.

In this vision he saw himself at home, injured unto death, from some cause that was not made quite clear. The family stood by his bedside, while his mother on bended knee called upon the name of Jesus to receive his spirit. Then for a time there was no thought, just perfect peace. A gentle voice, like his father's said, "Robert", and again "Robert." At the second call a feeling of glorious fullness of life came over him, while he seemed to have a perfect body, in pink and white, giving out a phosphorescent glow. He was also now a sexless being. He felt as if he were travelling through space until he entered what appeared to be moving like a great river, but was not water, but which had a transparent glow such as diamond dust might reflect. This lasted for some time, while he was looking out on the most perfect blue sky and in the distance he could see a great light.

As he approached it at great speed, he could see that this great light was crystal-white at its apex, but towards the edges that showed out from an incomprehensible distance, the colors of a prism showed up. Coming nearer he could behold a city whose magnificence words could not express, in the centre of which appeared a great white throne, and at a great distance towards both ends were two more thrones, over which were blue-tinted white lights. Connecting the three thrones was a great highway, crescent-shaped, that had the appearance of being paved with pure gold on which were millions of human beings, so beautiful and perfect in form, overwhelmed by happiness and able to rise or move forward without any apparent bodily effort. At the side of these highways and streets were such beautiful mansions that the eye did not seem able to take in all their grandeur, made from what was known on earth as precious stones with transparent roofs that enabled the light from the thrones to illuminate them ever with its brilliancy. Being still rushed forward in the great stream that now seemed to enter through the gate and then pass on by the throne on the right, he remembered the verses in Revelations that spoke of a crystal river that flowed out from the throne of God. On his right were five other gates, so he assumed that these were half of the twelve through which the twelve tribes must pass. Over the gate entered were inscribed hieroglyphics that, no doubt, represented the tribe he believed he was from.

On reaching the gate, a kindly-looking, beautiful form, much like what he considered himself now to be, reached out and grasped him by the hand, as if to make him more welcome. From all he

had now seen, he believed he had entered the pearly gates that throughout his earthly pilgrimage had ever beckoned him on. His new friend and guide touched his cheek with his own to re-assure him, and they both continued to go forward, without actually walking, to a delightful garden with beautiful groves of trees and elaborate flower-beds, apparently composed of a great combination of ever-changing lights with the magic touch, as it were, of the Aurora Borealis. Here a great throng, whose faces only reflected beauty, and whose nude bodies were graceful in form, and sexless, young and old, with all imperfections removed, made a sight of such exotic beauty that was beyond the power of the natural mind to conceive. They were singing, with all the enthusiasm that might be expected from such perfection, a Hallelujah chorus, after which they joined in groups with such expressions of happiness that would beggar any attempt of description. In this way some time appeared to have passed, although time made no difference, for perfect body is not subject to the weakness of the flesh.

Great enthusiasm was shown when music of tremendous volume, but blending the sweetest notes of silver-throated birds, was heard, as the great Master, typified as Jesus of Nazareth, appeared with two of His disciples, one on each side with retinue of followers, dressed in gowns of sparkling tinsel-like cloth, tinged with purple and gold. Many of His followers wore gorgeous sashes of royal colors draped from the right arm. The Master and His entourage advanced to a great court where the multitude were gathered to be judged for their works during the pilgrimage of life. Here it was expected that something in the form of a Great Book would be opened, in which their deeds would be all set down. But soon the kindly voice that had said on the banks of Galilee, "Come, follow me", now said, "For the deeds done in the flesh, thou shalt now be judged for eternal life." Each then was appointed to stand while the helpers placed before them a stand like a microphone and with shelf attached, crystal white in color. The Master now stood with bowed expression and each one had written before them their complete life-history, with every thought and action of their whole lives. There was no hiding now of false motives, the upholding of religion because it was fashionable, the holier-than-thou attitude, for now, stripped of their hypocritical cloaks, they stood, as it were, naked, before the eyes of Divine Justice. Many who had prided themselves on having their sins washed away in the blood of the lamb, now began to have a feeling of

great anxiety, while the self-righteous wondered if they would hear the greatest of all words, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of Thy Lord."

Robert had entered with the feeling he had lived within the letter of the law, but now, many of the acts he had believed conformed to the true principles of Christianity had been erased from his record as so much dross, which made him question himself regarding the motives that had prompted many of them. Then it was revealed to him that selfish motives had actually been behind them, and that they were not of God. Now, too late, he was to get his first true understanding of the words found in Isiah, Chapter 28, verse 17, "Judgment will I also lay to the line and righteousness to the plummet, and the hail shall sweep away the refuse of lies and the waters shall overflow the hiding place." Now he began to feel he was to be numbered among the damned, and he could no longer look upon the page from the Book of Life, revealing all his hidden thoughts and actions of past life, knowing that the motives behind them all were being weighed in the scales of eternal justice, showing that he had transgressed many of the great commandments, especially the one which said, "Thou shalt not kill." At first he tried to find comfort in the thought that he had only killed men as an act of patriotic duty, but was again quickly brought to the realization of the words which said, "Choose ye this day whom ye will serve whether it be God or Mammon." With the final summing-up to be made, his eyes again became set on the page before him which was soon to bring the closing words much more kindly than those he had expected, "You have been weighed in the balance and found wanting."

No sooner had these words appeared than an apparent unseen power caused the great throng to turn away from the court of Eternal Justice, leaving only a few to join the Heavenly band, who were now greeted with glorious music. The others, wailing and gnashing their teeth, were moved away from the garden in the direction of darkness that was hidden by the dazzling rays of bright light, while those whose salvation had been approved, were ushered through a great inner gate of pearls, the ornamental portions set with brilliant gems. Once the darkened space had been entered, a feeling like falling through space was experienced for some time, till in the distance could be seen the rays of brilliant red-colored light, which on being more closely approached cast a green reflection from the outer edges, while the red appeared to

glow with greater intensity. This at once gave rise to fear and anguish and agony among the others as they realized they were being ushered before the most forbidding-looking gate they had ever seen, and which their thoughts told them was Hell, with great walls, running as far as eye could see, that appeared to be made of the hardest grey granite, and which no imaginable power could break through. Its repelling appearance was further heightened by the lurid green light that shone from its walls.

Several guards then made their appearance from a dungeon-like room near the great gate, their giant stature recalling the sons of Anak. They at once waved the new comers to come forward, at which all complied, their fear being too great to offer any resistance. The great gate was then thrown open and as they entered another cordon of guards with huge forks of wicked appearance formed around them as they were moved forward. The scene before them was not only surprising but encouraging for, as far as eye could see, were the beautiful forms of men, women and children reclining on granite-like seats or walking or gliding through its great space. This was in great contrast to what had been pictured in their minds, but they were all imbued with a spirit of sadness at being imprisoned against their wills.

Soon, however, they were ushered through a great arch, illuminated by the vivid glare of reddish-green light, and into a great court with most luxurious furnishings, Oriental type, but harsh and cold in atmosphere. Here they were all hurried forward some distance, till they beheld, at the side of a huge altar, His Satanic Majesty, who was recognized from pictures of him. These had not really done him credit, for he was truly a beautiful creature, but with eyes of demon-like subtlety. Many of them suffered such paroxysms of fear and terror that they felt their spirits being wrenched from their bodies. Now they were again escorted by the giants back into the room they had come from and on through the great multitude they had already seen to another forbidding looking gateway, from which a strong odor of brimstone arose. Here again the great gate was opened upon a sight to cause the stoutest heart to quail with fear, as swirling and roaring flames licked at various beings, moaning and writhing in agony from its torments. Here, they were told, were cast wilful murderers, liars and those who had corrupted their fellows. About one third of the number now left were sorted out and thrown into its fiery depths.

When the gate closed with a great thud, a feeling of thankfulness went up from those still left, that their sins had not been such as to have them sentenced to such eternity of torture. Once more they were again marched on the way and then brought to a halt before a doorway when the captain of the guard ordered the door opened. Then he turned to them and said, "This is the place that hypocrites, sanctimonious scoundrels and unscrupulous, 'holier-than-thou' must spend eternity. They had every chance in life to know and uphold righteousness but through selfishness and worldly lust sold their birthrights, like those the Master described in Matthew, Chapter 23, verse 17, 'Wo unto you scribes and pharisees, hypocrites, for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are full of dead men's bones and uncleanness'." Then the great door swung open, depicting a sight that made the last fall into insignificance in its horror and frightfulness, for here was a great lake of seething flame containing every conceivable form of monstrosity from prehistoric monsters to creeping reptiles, the sight of which reminded Robert that he had often wondered where all these monsters had disappeared to, and for what purpose in life had they been created. Well, here they were in all their diabolical forms with now asbestos-like hides that only seemed to glow all the more with the intensity of the fire.

With this awful scene before them, they all fell on their knees to plead for mercy, but this word meant nothing here, and they were hurled in the lake of fire with all the fierceness that these wicked and evil-minded demons could show. So dazed were they by the terribleness of it all, and in finding that their bodies were not at once consumed by the roaring flames, they commenced to rush in all directions to get away from first one terror and then another. Robert felt he was being chased by a hideous Dinosaur in maddening fury, but moving away quickly he found himself facing the dreadful head of a giant-like dragon, whose terrible fangs were lowering over his head to strike with all its fury. This intense fear brought such great beads of perspiration to his forehead that his nurse became greatly alarmed believing the end was approaching after her long and silent vigil. She was about to rush and fetch the doctors, who were studying his strange case, when he jumped from his cot, yelling, "Save me, save me!" Several attendants rushed forward and held him down on his cot believing he had gone temporarily insane, and were about to strap him

down when he looked around, as if coming out of a great stupor, and asked in an excited voice, "Where am I?" The nurse, unable to speak English, called one of the doctors who spoke English and Robert then learned about the terrible explosion and of his being found and the ten days he had been watched over so carefully in the hospital while in a coma. They had almost given up all hopes of recovery, they said.

He then told them how he had been awakened by the most terrible dream it was possible to imagine, so realistic he could not get it from his mind. His doctors then ordered complete quiet and no talking, and for the next three days he was left to painful reflection, before he was to learn why he had been given such good care, by his captors.

CHAPTER 37

*"The way is dark, my child, but leads to light,
I would not have thee always walk by sight,
My dealings now thou can'st not understand,
I meant it so, but I will take thy hand,
And through the gloom lead safely home, my child."*

—Henry N. Cobb.

WHEN he did talk it was to the same doctor and as he was fairly conversant with the English language, and a sympathetic, good sort of a fellow, a good many details of Robert's narrow escape from death itself were unfolded to him. He and one other Canadian had been found by the stretcher-bearers at the outer edge of the great mound of earth that had been blown off the top of hill thirty-four, while a third man had been found the next day at the bottom of the crater torn to pieces from the explosion. The other had been taken to another hospital, had rallied quickly and in a week had been able to leave the hospital, and was now held in one of the prison camps. But, with his arm broken and several bad bruises that gave evidence of the shock he must have received, it was a miracle that Robert had survived, the doctor said.

He was then told how it had occurred, which was also reason for his life being saved. A shell from one of the British guns had fallen short, just beyond the edge of their own trenches, being directly over the sap, and its explosion had not only been the means of trapping them by the amount of earth that filled it in, but also ignited the fuse wire that set the mine off. Robert could not help but think that behind it all was the providential care and grace of God due to the power of prayer, forgetting, however, that his other mate had not also been saved.

In the six weeks' period in hospital before the cast was removed from his arm, Robert only conversed with the doctor for three short periods and the rest of his waking time was necessarily spent in thought. Memories of his mother, his home life, of Mamie, of Betty and his little children, constantly filled his mind. And, of course, he spent much time in pondering on the ways of Providence which allowed great Christian nations to

place their men on the field of battle, opposing each other. At last the day came when he was removed from the hospital to what was called a home for convalescents, but the poor accommodation and food made it little less than a real prison. In addition he was frequently given a kind of third degree by several big Uhlan officers seeking information concerning the strength and plans of the opposing armies. As he could not reply to their questions, his privileges, such as they were, were abolished and he suffered many indignities at their hands. Once more the truth was borne home to him, that war is Hell, and brings to the surface the vilest and most degrading passions in men. While here, he learned from another prisoner, who could speak the German language, information that put him doubly on his guard concerning the manner of his former escape from Germany, for he knew what it would mean to the friends who had been so kind to him if the secret ever got out. He learned that a good deal of suspicion had been aroused at German Air Force headquarters because the body of Von Machensen (whom he had impersonated) had never been traced.

Due to his refusal to cooperate with his captors, Robert was to be removed to Camp Dulmen, thence to assist in farm work, he learned. He conjured visions of fresh air, good food and clean beds of sweet hay but again he was disappointed, for on arrival at camp he soon learned that he and other prisoners were to pave roadways with heavy stones over which heavy transports would take war materials to the front. The food was so poor that before three days had passed, the men had become so weak they could hardly carry on, receiving for breakfast, only a small portion of black bread and rancid coffee and for the other two meals, turnip soup with an occasional change to what was called porridge, the same being so gritty and tasteless that it was soon named "Kaiser Bill's Sandstorm."

After two months of this work they were entrained for work in mines. This time they did not expect too much, so that when they were ordered from their train, weary and stiff after an eight hours' trip, they were beyond feeling and were not so badly disappointed when the heavy dusty air told them they were in a coal-mining district, which they learned later, was the province of West phalia. From here they were marched to what was known as the the Black Hole, a large camp of frame buildings erected for war prisoners with barb-wire entanglements on all sides and sentries

with drawn bayonets, so that the thought of escape was at once almost squelched. Here they were greeted by others prisoners of war, French, Russian, English and Canadian nationality, doing the heaviest work on the scantiest rations.

The next day they were delegated to different kinds of work, Robert being sent with five others to the coke-mine, which to those unaccustomed to the work is sheer unadulterated Hell. During the first three days Robert's eyes and lungs burned so from the noxious gas that he hardly knew when he fell into his dirty cot, whether he was dead or alive. Through it all, though, no day ended without him praying to God, asking His blessing and for strength to survive his trials. On the fourth day, part of the coal storage caved in, killing one of his four comrades. On reporting it to the officer in charge he was told that the dirty swine would have to remain there till the coal was shovelled up, there being no time to dig him out. At this, Robert and the other three were so incensed that they refused to work further. After having their meager rations held back for two days, they felt it useless to try and hold out for rights or honor against such odds, and were again given the measly black bread and coffee. They were, however, moved to another part of the mine.

Days and months thus passed under the most rigid discipline. Awakened at four o'clock each morning by sentries beating the butts of their rifles on the wooden floor (with hard kicks for any sleep-soddened prisoner who did not respond immediately) they were each served a cup of black coffee only, in lieu of breakfast, and then marched to the mines, where prison garb was exchanged for working clothes. Here they were kept till three-thirty in the afternoon under the keen eye of the guard, who saw to it that their every moment was fully occupied. At that time they exchanged clothes again, were given a bowl of turnip soup, marched back to camp, given another bowl of soup at seven, and then sent to bed. Under such trying conditions, few could have lived, had it not been for the parcels from home, which came through the Red Cross, these contained not only a message of cheer and hope, but the sustaining foods that kept body and soul together; to meet the daily grind. Their jailers being that class of humanity war breeds, picked from the jetsam and flotsam of life.

This morale and health destroying routine, actually a living death, continued for nearly two years with no communication from friends. He was afraid even to write to Bertha or her grand-

mother in case their secret would be found out. There were times, though, when the temptation was so great that he almost yielded, thinking that by so doing he could find out if Carl had been able to inform them if he had gotten back home to Canada or not, and thus let Betty know that he, Robert, was still alive. But, he let the matter stand in abeyance. He continued to pour forth his inmost thoughts to God in silent prayer, firm in his belief that as He had brought him through so many trials and difficulties, He would soon open the way for a lifting of his afflictions.

At last the great day dawned for which millions had prayed for four years and more, Armistice Day, November Eleventh, when the triumphal news of peace was carried round the world, bringing joy to millions of hearts everywhere. No place was the news received with greater fervor and jubilation than the Black Hell in which Robert had now put in so many strenuous hours trying to keep body and soul together, that he might return to his loved ones. When the news was first made known, and before he joined in the merry-making of his excited fellow-prisoners numbering some three hundred, a silent prayer was uttered by him.

A week later he was liberated in an exchange of prisoners and told his story to British officials in London, who then informed him that he had been listed as having died in the British sap at Hill Thirty-Four. When they were assured that he was actually Robert Benson and realized he was one of the war's great heroes, his back pay was made over to him together with a special allowance of one hundred pounds for special services to his country. The tragedy was, though, that due to the oversight of a clerk in the Records office, the story of his thrilling adventure or even the fact that he was still alive, was never published.

In another week, dressed in a new uniform, with a passport for home and a week's consumption of good food already reflected in his face and form, he found himself, with several more of his fellow countrymen, on the great docks of Liverpool, waiting to board a great ocean greyhound bound for New York.

It was a merry party that crowded its deck rails as the last siren announced it was about to weigh anchor, but mixed with many happy thoughts were sad memories of those who would lie forever in Flanders. What consolation could they take back to their parents, wives and sweethearts at home? With calm seas and days of beautiful sunshine, from which Robert's lungs and nerves especially benefitted, the time soon passed until on the morning

of the sixth day, the Statute of Liberty and the skyscrapers of New York were sighted. Five hours later, the big liner had docked amid the din of welcoming sounds, giving a pleasant thrill to many American boys. To Robert, however, the all-important thought was to take the first train that would speed him on his homeward way. His first thought was to go by way of his old home to see his parents, but on second thought, he decided to go to Betty and the children first and then they would all take a trip back to his parent's for a real visit with them. Two hours later he was speeding homeward on a fast train on a journey that four days later, with a few changes, would bring him to Saskola, the mecca to which his thoughts were constantly directed, for here Betty and the children were living with her mother, to the best of his knowledge.

On the journey he spent hours in anticipation of the reception he would receive from them. His mind would also become filled with plans for a new home, as, after the trip to see his parents, he had decided to go to one of the newer towns and open up a small business, where he would settle down, fully determined in his own mind that unless war was brought to his own door, he would never again lift a gun against a fellow being. On the afternoon of the fourth day, the limitless prairies once more came into view, covered as they were with the great white mantle of winter that made them so attractive to one who had looked on them in so many different periods of the year. The train pushed across its open spaces, making the telegraph poles into a great fence with an occasional break in it, till soon the early darkness of mid-December shut out the view, and the cold crisp air gave notice that winter's advance guards had already passed that way. In another hour he would be at Saskola, to which he felt the compass of love was ever guiding him.

At last the bright lights of the city were coming into view, but it seemed like eons of time to Robert before the grinding brakes gave notice that the station had been reached. No sooner had the train been brought to a stop than he was on the platform, and noticing a hotel nearby he immediately went there to have a wash and a cup of coffee before setting out to find the home of Betty and her mother. Ten minutes later, feeling greatly refreshed, he was asking his way to the street address he sought and in a short time he was approaching a neat but modern-type home in a

good district, feeling at last that here was the place and now the hour when his dream of years would, at least, come true.

Stepping to the door, he pushed the bell and a moment later the door was opened by a woman he had never seen before. For a moment he stood in surprise, but quickly asked had he made a mistake or was this not the home of Mrs. Dixon? The lady at once replied sympathetically that she understood that a lady of that name had lived there, but, as she had been there only three months, she thought he would get more accurate information next door from Mrs. Thomas, who had lived there many years. He was soon ringing the bell next door and the lady there immediately opened the door, quickly assuring him she would be only too glad to help him. As soon as he mentioned the name, Mrs. Dixon, he was invited into the well furnished living-room, where Mrs. Thomas at once said, "I knew Mrs. Dixon quite well, we were in each other's homes almost daily, also her daughter, Lorraine, and Mrs. Benson and her two lovely little children." A look of pride came into Robert's eyes, only to be turned to a look of pain at her next words as she continued, "Mr. Benson was killed over two years ago in the war, but no doubt, being a friend and a soldier as well, you will know all about that. Well, when a young doctor named Graham, whom Lorraine had met at the hospital came to board with them, he fell in love with Mrs. Benson and they were married about a year ago." As Robert was sitting in the shadow cast by a large lamp-shade, his informant failed to notice how this recital was affecting him, for she continued, "After the wedding, they moved to 117 Fairmount St., where Dr. Graham had purchased a beautiful little home, while Mrs. Dixon took a suite in a block. I was over to visit her only last week, and she is very comfortable. However, at the time of Mr. Benson's death, Mrs. Benson suffered a nervous breakdown, and was ill for four months, it was then she told me that her husband had gone away so quickly that she had not realized what it was going to mean to her till after she had come home here and discussed it with her sister and mother. Reading of the terrible conditions they had to live and fight under, especially, the gas attack, and the daily reading of the casualty lists," said Mrs. Thomas.

As Robert rose to go she asked for his name so she could 'phone Betty, she said. Between shock and surprise, Robert was hardly aware of the answer he made, but he intimated that as he was only passing through, he would hardly have time to call in

person now, but he would 'phone them when he returned to the station. By this time he could feel such a passion of hate surging through him, worse than he had ever felt in his whole war experience, that he rushed to the door, after thanking her, for fear he would make a scene.

By the time he had reached the street his rage had reached such a stage that unconsciously he fingered his revolver in its holster, and with an oath his walk quickened to almost a run as he thought of this contemptible slacker—this doctor—who had not the courage to go and defend his country. He had stayed at home, and in the dark hour of Robert's trial and adversity had taken his most priceless possession. Robert was determined to make that night the doctor's last for here was a personal foe who would receive no compassion. At last the street where Doctor Graham and Betty lived came in sight, with only one more block to go. Then his last act in life would be enacted. It was in this fiendish mood that he turned into the open gateway leading to a beautiful bungalow, but all he saw was the number 117. Approaching the two steps leading to the verandah, he slipped the revolver back into the open holster, with the decision that he would give Graham a man to man chance for his life. About to push the button, his attention was directed to a large front window with a half-drawn blind. He must look in and see if it was the right place. Going to the far side where he was hidden from view, he found he could look through the lace work on the shade by bending down. The sight that met his gaze was enough to disarm the most determined enemy, for facing the window was a large chesterfield, on which sat a man, Dr. Graham presumably, playing with little Lorraine, while nearby in front of a gaily-lighted Christmas tree, sat Robert Junior, playing with a number of toys. At the far side was a baby carriage, partly covered with a white wool blanket, with a little hand showing just over its edge, and through the archway was a nicely furnished dining-room to which Betty had entered several times as she put the finishing touches to the evening meal. With his eyes intensely focussed on the scene, the shutter of his brain, as it were, clicked a picture that he would carry for life. Now his eyes lit on Lorraine who was pointing to an enlarged picture set off by a silk Canadian flag, which he at once recognized as being of himself, as she asked in her childish way, "Daddy, oo is dat?" Robert faintly heard the man say, "That is another brave daddy who went away across the sea and could

never come back." These words must have been overheard by Betty, as she came to the arch with such a sad expression on her face, as if to look again at the picture. Then she called them to the evening meal, as she went over and lifted a healthy-looking baby from the carriage.

This was more than his physical powers could stand, as with upraised head and appealing hands he cried, "Oh, God, have mercy on me! Physically and mentally I have been through Hell! Can it be possible Thou wouldst bring me back to this?" Feeling weak and faint he made a rush to get away from the verandah, succeeding only in falling behind a small hedge, a few feet away, where he remained lying in the snow for some time before coming to. By now the cold had so numbed his body that had it not been for the thought of being found dead there, he would have made no further effort to rise, but with this thought preying on his mind, he summoned every ounce of energy in his body into action in order to get away. In doing so, his revolver, on which, in an idle hour on the boat he had scratched his initials, fell unnoticed from its holster into the heavy snow.

Once on his feet he walked to a nearby drug-store where he 'phoned for a taxi to take him to a hotel. Here, on signing the register, he wrote "Robert" and was about to write "Benson" when the thought struck him that he should not sign his own name in case his return was made known from the inquiry he had made at the Thomas home, so he finished by signing Robert J. Bradley, Metrople. He was then shown to his room where, all alone, he would have to make, perhaps, the greatest decision of his life. On lying on the bed, his mind became too confused for clear thinking, some thoughts being blood-thirsty and others calm and forgiving. At last, in his endeavor to find peace from his mental agony, he decided to pour out his inmost soul in prayer, which he did in the following words, "Most merciful and loving Father in Heaven, Thou who knowst the trials and afflictions of this life and what the flesh is subject to, I most humbly approach Thy throne of mercy to ask that Thou wilt give me faith to understand Thy will, and courage to defend myself against the overwhelming power that has all but engulfed me. If I have committed an offence in Thy sight, give to me an understanding heart, that I may know not to commit such offence again, for in the great vision Thou gavest me when nigh unto death, I was shown what it was to be a hypocrite in Thy sight. My afflictions I cannot

understand, for Oh, God, Thou knowest it has ever been my desire to do Thy will and keep Thy commandments. But why should I, so many times, as it were, snatched from the jaws of death, be brought home to what must be a living death? It is more than my present faith can stand. If Thou, Oh, God, art a personal God, as I have ever believed and accepted from Thy word of truth, and I have erred in my understanding, give me wisdom to interpret Thy will, for without Thee, life would be vanity of vanities; I ask that Thou wilt grant to me the peace and strength that will assuage the pangs that now seem to be tearing my soul asunder. This I ask through the merit of Christ, my Redeemer, Amen, Amen."

After the flood-gates of his soul had thus opened, a great calm came over him. As he once more lay on his bed, thoughts came in a more concrete form. He realized what the word "dead" in the casualty list must have meant to Betty with two helpless children to care for. She had not been to blame, he thought now, and had been justified in accepting the offer of a home. As for her husband, he had not acted in any but a respectful manner towards his memory. He had also taken care of his two orphan children. How grateful he now was that his hand had been held back from committing the grave mistake of shedding innocent blood in a moment of passion! No, fate might be using him most cruelly and the reason for God permitting it would be known in His time. So, for the present, his identity must remain unknown, and from now on, the name he had signed at the hotel must be his. He would leave this place far behind so that no chance meeting could cause unhappiness to any of them. He must bear the cross alone. He then arranged to be called for the early morning train going West and with this settled, he soon found rest from his trials in sound sleep.

The next morning he went directly from the hotel to the train on which he breakfasted. Later, as it hurried through the cold, frosty air to Utopia, he definitely decided on his course during that eight-hour trip. He would try to build a new life on the ruins of this one, but he had two most perplexing problems. He wanted to see his people at home and he wanted to talk things over with Sandy. But, in both cases, he felt there was danger that his secret would be found out, so he knew he would have to trust to time, the great healer, to show him a way out.

Arriving at Utopia, he spent the following day at real estate offices and wholesale houses in search of a small business at some

out-of-the-way point, that he could handle with his small capital of about Twelve Hundred Dollars. At last he was offered what he considered would suit him—a business in a new town about one hundred and twenty miles further west, at the end of steel. He then fitted himself out in civilian clothes. Making the trip the following day he was able to close out the deal with the owner, who was desirous of getting away, so that he was able immediately to take possession. In a short time he secured many more customers than his predecessor, most of them soon learning he was a returned soldier, but no one ever knew the secret of his past life. There were some close friends who remarked on what they considered his absent-mindedness at times, but as he told them his nerves had been upset from shell-shock due to premature explosion of a mine, no further comment was forthcoming.

CHAPTER 38

The experience of life shows our dispositions like our features are all different, therefore, must be in accordance with a Divine plan, but that plan places on us a responsibility that character must be trained and pruned to give the assurance of a fruitful harvest.—Nota Bene.

MANY times in the first few weeks in the new town, called Decision Lake, with everything strange around him, with his mind in a most unsettled state, and with many long evening hours spent in the solitude of his sparsely furnished bedroom, Robert was tempted to throw it all up and go, he knew not where. Then thoughts of Sandy's experience, in many ways similar to his own, would come to his mind, and he would then reflect on what he had said—"The best and happiest place in the world is your own home, no matter how humble, if you live inside your income." These words had the power of reconciling him to his lot on many occasions, but there were times when a greater problem came before his mind, the one on which the foundation of his faith rested. Was there a personal God? If so, why should one, who had tried to build his faith on such a rock, have to withstand all the trials and afflictions that he had through life? Was there not a promise given in His word: Matt., ch. 21, v. 22. And all things whatsoever, ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive. Luke, ch. 11, v. 9. And I say unto you, "Ask and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock and it shall be opened unto you. John, ch. 11, v. 22, But I know, that even now, whatsoever thou shall ask of God, God will give it thee. Did these words really mean what they implied or was his interpretation of them not correct? Had he not continually asked that his loved one be protected till he could again be permitted to return to them? His appeal had not been answered! Who was responsible? But he recalled how his life had been spared on so many occasions—surely this was evidence of God's favor? But there was Mike O'Hara, Carl and many others who do not outwardly profess any religious convictions, still show that physical and moral cour-

age, to face death in any form. Where then is to be found the answer.

Then, like a great panorama his life's experiences were unfolded before him mentally, but the most vivid memories he had were of the disasters he had come through. It would be blasphemy to accredit them to a loving God surely? But look at them:—the cyclone that had destroyed his home; his going to war; the battle of Ypres; the fighting at Festubert; the air-crash and the fatal mine explosion; the two years of living death spent as a prisoner in a coal-dump. Still the thought came, "Yes, but through it all, you have been brought safely, what other power could you ascribe it to but God's?" But, now searching deeply for the why and wherefore of things, he was reminded of the story he had heard Sandy tell of a minister, who wishing to show the love of God, had illustrated it in this way: A few years ago a missionary going to a foreign field had booked his passage and already gone to his berth aboard ship when, remembering he had forgotten his Bible, he left the ship to get it. Being delayed owing to a traffic accident he did not return before the ship sailed. Two days later the ship, crew and all its passengers were lost. He then asked, "Who is there to say God's providential care was not shown in this case?" A grizzled-looking old man in the back seat, who had been listening attentively said, "Mr. Parson, what kind of a God are you talking about that you would credit him with saving one little soul and allow scores to perish. Away with your piffle." The more Robert reflected on the story, the more reasonable the old man's answer appeared. A God of Justice is not doing things that way.

Many weeks passed with business steadily increasing as well as friends, till at the end of the fifth month an event happened that was as great a surprise as in the happiness it brought. One day after the arrival of the tri-weekly mixed train, he was told by the agent that a big dog, all the way from England, prepaid, was at the station addressed to R. Benson, care of R. Bradley. At first wondering how a dog could come from England addressed to him, he decided that there had been a mistake made somewhere. Then he thought of Kamerad, and was soon at the station where his attention was at once called to the address of Robert Benson, in care of Robert J. Bradley, Decision Lake. At once the box was opened and Kamerad recognizing his master's voice went wild in his delight at seeing him by jumping up and placing his big paws against him in a mad desire to lick his face. Robert, greatly sur-

prised and at a loss to know how his address away out here in this hamlet could have been obtained, did not hear many of the questions asked by a number who had gathered around, but he had a full explanation when he received his mail and opened a letter which read as follows:

London, England, April 25, 1919.

Captain Robert Benson,
Decision Lake.

My dear Sir:

It was with considerable pleasure after several months' waiting, that I was able to learn of your present address. For, early in December, I received word from the war-office that you had been found among the prisoners in Germany, having miraculously escaped death at Hill thirty-four, at which place you were officially reported killed.

Two weeks ago, in answer to my query for further information as to your address, I received a letter informing me of same, which had been learned through some correspondence you had in regard to further monies due you, so that I at once felt it my duty to send your faithful dog, which had given such valued service carrying dispatches, in the front lines. He had fallen into my hands when his foot was badly injured from shrapnel, and I, at the time, connected with the Dispatch Branch of Field Service, and a lover of dogs, had him sent to my home in England where he has received every care and become a great favorite in the home owing to his kindness and intelligence. But, appreciating as I do how much such a dog means to its owner, I now have the pleasure in sending him forward to you with my compliments; also at this time, I wish to take the opportunity of expressing my congratulations on your noble war record in the field of action.

Yours very truly,

Lieut. Martin H. Bursall.

When Robert had finished reading this letter he could not help but think of the chivalrous and kindly action of this man he had never seen going to the trouble and expense of shipping Kamerad out to him! During this time the dog had sat quietly beside him, looking up into his face with a blinking expression as if he understood all that the letter contained. He now jumped up, making a

couple of circles around in a playful mood, while Robert turned towards him saying, "Well, old Pal, this is an example of true friendship which we must acknowledge with thanks and appreciation," and at once rose and went to get the pen and paper.

Robert carefully explained that the dog had been addressed to Robert Benson, in his care, as the sender had thought that he, Bradley, would know where his old war-time pall was. He had known the dog in France too, he explained. The sender of the dog out to him here had not known that Benson had "gone west" in the last days of the war, he guessed. Full of sympathy and admiration for him and his friend's dog, Robert's customers and friends soon took a liking to the friendly dog with the war record, and Robert was much happier.

CHAPTER 39

*"Charity is that rational and constant affection
which makes us sacrifice ourselves for others."*

—Confucius.

As the months passed Robert found much to do in promoting his business and taking his part in promoting the interests of the new community. This did not prevent the single girls from making definite efforts to rouse his interest in them, however, even to the point of stretching out their grocery orders when visiting his store. His failure to respond convinced them he was engaged to a girl "back home" finally, and he was left alone. He was tempted to write Bertha but he feared the news might travel back to Betty through Carl, so he took no chances. He did arrange to have the Saskola newspaper mailed him and thus frequently picked up news about Betty and Dr. Graham.

With the approach of another Christmas he decided to go and see Sandy and have some heart to heart talks with him, and was, indeed, on the point of packing when he realized that even if he got off at another station near his place and drove over, he would be recognized as he had been so well known throughout the district. So he had to drop that plan, spending Christmas at the home of one of his new-made friends in a quiet but pleasant way, several tots of good Scotch whiskey having the effect of drowning out the memories of happier Christmasses.

The balance of the winter passed quickly, entertainment with card parties and dancing filling in his spare time and then came the rush of spring, soon followed by halcyon days between the two busy seasons of western farm life, when ball-games and picnics were the order of the day. The season had only just commenced when on opening his paper one evening, he was stunned by the headlines he saw on the front page, as he read the following: "Dr. N. G. Graham, well-known surgeon, killed in auto accident while returning from week-end trip to the beach". The shock so effected him that it was some time before he could finish reading the general details revealing that a truck driven by a drunken driver had hit the doctor's car, pinning the doctor beneath.

His first thought was to go at once and help Betty to bear up but it would only render her subject to a double shock if he turned up, he realized, so he had to suppress his natural inclination and carry on with his work. The papers that arrived later recounted further details and mentioned that the widow had twice been bereft of a husband in four years, her first husband being Captain Robert Benson, killed at Hill Thirty-four.

At this, the paper fell from his hand as he slumped back in his chair, wondering how much longer bad luck was to dog his footsteps. There must be a solution of his problem which would enable him to rejoin his family. Two weeks had passed before he could decide what action to take, and the idea for it came quickly when opening up some boxes. He would write a letter to Betty, posting it in Utopia, saying that a near friend, knowing of her sad affliction, was going to call and see her in a few days, wording it with such sympathy that he felt she would not be too greatly shocked when he turned up as the "near friend." The day following his decision he had the conductor take the letter (signed—"A near friend") with some others to post in Utopia, pretending they had been too late for the mail at Decision Lake. Three days later found him on the train to Utopia, where he would change for Saskola.

Next day he was on his way to Saskola, due there at four that afternoon. At lunch time he answered the first call and was soon seated at one of the tables in the dining car where several other passengers were already seated. Believing there were none there that he might be interested in, he at once directed his attention to the menu unaware of the fact that his entry had caused a lady diner seated at one of the tables to almost collapse in a faint, believing she was seeing a spectre out of her past life. Then she tried to calm herself with the idea that it was only an illusive idea of her imagination. His back was turned to her, she was unable to see his face, but her attention was riveted on his every movement, so much so that all desire for food vanished. She spent some time in trying to assure herself that she knew him, although she failed to see his face. Finally giving in to pure hunch she called a porter and had him page Mr. Robert Benson. If a gentleman responded, she said, he was to be brought back to her compartment.

In the day coach the porter announced "a call for Mr. Robert Benson" but no one responded, Robert feeling sure no one knew

his real name. The porter returned to make his report, but was again asked to go and ask the man who had sat at the dining table she fully described, to come back to her compartment. In a few minutes the porter returned with the man she had described. As they entered the car, a feeling of such ecstatic expectancy came over her that she was at a loss for words and was actually surprised when the porter said, "Dis am the lady that wanted to speak with you." Robert immediately removed his hat with a polite bow and the lady at once recollected the quiff he had always put in his hair when combing it. In her exultation of joy she jumped up from her seat with extended arms to clasp him saying, "Robert, Robert, I was so sure it was you." Shocked with surprise, he noted the passengers' curiosity, and believing it was a case of mistaken identity, offered his arm to the lady, suggesting they go back to her compartment.

The moment they were seated and he looked up into her face, recognizing her, he felt magnetized by her presence and in a moment his arms went about her with his old-time fervor as he said, "Mamie, Mamie, can such a pleasure be possible?" Then he kissed her twice upon her cheek as they both cried with joy. Finally, locked in each other's arms they commenced to tell their experiences since last they had met. Mamie commenced at that point where she had written the fatal letter to Robert, but she was so anxious to know how he came to be on that train, when for years she had mourned him as dead that she demanded his story right a way. Saskola, where she planned to change trains for a summer resort, was reached long before Robert's story was finished, so she decided to stay over there to hear the balance of it. Robert quickly agreed, feeling that such an unexpected meeting was of Divine guidance.

Some four hours later, during which time they had partaken of dinner at a leading hotel and moved into the hotel lounge where they sat side by side on a chesterfield with his arm round her shoulders, Robert was still reciting adventures and answering questions. But some chance remark made Mamie feel that she must unburden her mind of all the pent-up thoughts that had brooded there so long, so she commenced with a recital of all that had taken place from the time Robert had last bidden her good-bye till the present. Perhaps most important was the explanation that she had written the fatal letter in the fond hope that he would write a letter so full of apologies and endearments that her vanity would be

tickled and she would feel she was on a pedestal and worshipped from afar. When his letter had come she had been too independent and proud to write and admit she was wrong. News of his engagement had brought on a breakdown and after her recovery she had devoted her life to nursing. Now she was matron of a hospital at Glendale, 150 miles northeast of Utopia.

During her recital, Robert noted there was no mention of her marriage to anyone, so he then said, "Mamie, from what you have told me, am I to understand you have never married?" At this she nestled a little closer into his embrace as she replied, "No, I have never married, Robert, and have never had any desire to do so, feeling no doubt that, false to one, I would also be false to another. My father was transferred to the pastorate at Glendale two years after, so that I have been at home all these years." As she concluded her story, Robert took her hands, saying, "Mamie, I have always loved you, and before God, anything you have done in my sight is forgiven, for I too have learned in the hard school of experience the true meaning of these words. I think I wrote in that last letter to you to study well the emotions that prompt the action, for experience is a hard but masterful teacher and too often its lessons are seen too late to benefit us in this life."

Then Robert again started to tell her why he was on the train to which she listened with heartfelt sympathy, but, she suffered pangs of jealousy for she felt he was free of obligations to the one who had taken her place in his life. He knew it would be difficult to meet Betty under such trying circumstances, he said, but felt it a duty that could not be put off. Then, pulling his watch from his pocket to ascertain the time, he said, "Now, Mamie, I must not keep you any longer, for I know from the excitement you have been under, how tired you must feel," to which she replied, "But Robert, how glorious it all has been." After they kissed each other good-night they went to their rooms, agreeing to meet for breakfast.

Next morning Mamie told Robert several things of personal interest, most important of which was her account of the trip she had taken back to their old home last summer, where she had spent a day with his mother, who was still mourning her great loss, having never received any word except the brief note that he had been killed in action. His father had been in good health then and George had married two years ago. She then urged him to write home at once. He stated that had always been his intention,

but he had felt, up to now, that they could not be carried out under the circumstances. As Mamie left on the train, she said, "Robert, now I want you to promise me you will go to Glendale and see father and mother right away. If you will do so, on your return, I shall come back from my holidays and go with you. Here is my address, so you can 'phone me, as I know under the circumstances it is hard for you to know when it will be." Their lips again met in a kiss that carried with it all the depth of ardent affection, as the train slowly pulled out.

CHAPTER 40

Perfection should be made a passion in life, so that we might look deeper into its real meaning, ever keeping in mind the Sun in its planetary circuit, never stopping or swerving from right to left.—Nota Bene.

LEFT alone with his thoughts, Robert again thought of his coming meeting with Betty, realizing how hard it was going to be. Resolved, however, to act as naturally and unaffectedly as possible, believing that by so doing, he would help Betty best to get through the crucial moment when they would first meet, he set off for her home, arriving in front of her door a short time later. In answer to his knock the door was opened by a pleasant-looking elderly woman, whom he at once took to be Betty's mother, although he had never met her before. She asked him in and he asked for Betty she appeared rather surprised, but assuming he was the friend who had written recently, she said she would call Mrs. Graham, who still needed rest to counteract the shock she'd received in Dr. Graham's death. The call was at once answered with, "I'll be right down." The next few moments required more courage of Robert than zero hour had ever called for, for now he must meet the one of cherished memories. He sat in a chair facing the door and the moment she entered the door, he rose to meet her. In that moment she recognized his features and manly bearing, shrieking, "Oh, oh," as if a ghost confronted her. Next moment, owing to the shock, she tottered and would have fallen had not Robert caught her, lowering her on to the chesterfield. At the commotion her mother rushed in, only to leave hurriedly in search of water with which to revive Betty.

It was some minutes before she could speak, and in the interim Robert told her mother the cause of her surprise, which caused her also to look at him with such startled eyes that he feared she also was going to faint away. When Robert bent over Betty and she looked up at him, she still couldn't assimilate the fact of his presence and with the shout "Go away, go away", burst into a paroxysm of tears. Thinking it best to remove himself temporarily,

Robert asked her mother to persuade Betty that he had returned in the flesh, while he went out into the garden.

Near a tree in the garden Robert spied Robert Junior and Lorraine and another little girl having a tea-party, so he asked if he could join their party. At this Lorraine asked him his name. Almost unconsciously he replied, "Daddy". With this she rushed at him saying, "Are you my other Daddy from away across the sea?" When he said, "Yes," Robert Junior, who had been eyeing him curiously, jumped up and ran to his other side to climb on his knee as he hugged and kissed them both. The other little girl rushed over to her home, next door, to tell her mother that Lorraine had another Daddy come to see her from away across the sea. In the meantime Betty came out from the house, only to find Robert with one of the children on each knee, so busy answering their questions, that he did not see her coming. Finally convinced by this action of the children, she threw both arms around from the back, kissing him on the cheek, mute with joy, but with tears of happiness pouring from her eyes. Robert at once rose and placing his arm about her took her back to the house. Meeting her mother on the way, he did not wait to be introduced, but kissed her on the cheek as he said, "You must be Betty's mother. This act aroused her motherly love, as her attention to him soon showed. Betty now led the way back to the chesterfield, where both children were again immediately on his knee, but as he was anxious to talk with their mother he gave them money for candy and they were soon free of them.

Betty at once asked how it was possible that the authorities could have made such a terrible mistake as to insist that he was dead, and what had he been doing since. This caused him to repeat the whole story of his adventures once more, but when he came to the part where he had once before stood by that window and had looked upon that scene that in a moment had turned a pictured paradise into hell, she grasped him more closely, saying in a convulsive way, "Oh, Robert, how could you, how could you ever go away?" But before he could reply she again added, "Now, I know the secret of it all." She then told him how, after the snow had gone, the spring before, a pistol, with the initials R.B., had been found in the garden. Beyond thinking the similar initials had been a coincidence, however, they had given no further thought to it.

A short time later, the crying of the baby from the hammock on the verandah caused her to jump up with a start, and the look on her face indicated, plainer than words, that already she was wondering if the baby would constitute a barrier when discussing future plans, for she knew Robert's streak of jealousy. As her attention was taken up for sometime, Robert went out to talk to her mother and learned that Sandy had been married to Lorraine for three years. This was certainly great news for Robert, though it was some time before he could really grasp the idea.

After a happy dinner hour had been spent, the next door neighbour called to see if her little girl had been right about Mrs. Graham's war-hero husband returning, and after being introduced left in a short while so that she could be the first to spread the news.

The result was that the next morning the newspapers in glaring headlines read, "Captain Robert Benson, D.S.M., mourned as dead for four years, returns to the city to his wife, who was Mrs. (Dr.) N. G. Graham, recently fatally injured in an auto accident on the Beach road."

The newspapers made so much of the story that the little home, almost overnight, became the chief point of interest in the city, so that Robert felt such notoriety was too trying for Betty. On the third day, he felt he must get away from it all, thus removing the point of interest from Betty's home before the continued fuss sent her to the hospital again. He decided he would leave the following morning for Decision Lake, so he asked Betty to arrange that they should spend the evening together alone, as, recognizing what he still felt his duty to both her and the children, he wished to discuss future plans with her.

After an early dinner, they adjourned to her room, where, seated in an easy chair, he once more took her upon his knee, as he had many times before, and indulged in a heart-to-heart talk. Betty, having expressed her willingness to take up life with him again, where they had left off, after a reasonable time had passed in respect to the memory of Doctor Graham, really left the decision to Robert, for it all hinged on whether he could accept another man's child in his home. Robert must decide whether he could play a real father's part toward the new baby as well as his own, or whether he wanted to live with Betty for selfish motives alone, irregardless of whether he loved the new baby or not. The matter

of Betty and the family support didn't come into the question as the doctor had left her comfortably provided for.

Betty finally said, "Well, Robert, now you know my innermost thoughts I want you to take a year to think the idea over, and then come and tell me frankly what you have decided, and whatever your answer is, I will abide by it. I want you to write me regularly, and visit us as often as possible, for you know how eagerly the children will look forward to such visits. Whatever may happen to our plans, I shall never forget your unselfish and kindly act." As she finished, he looked into her dreamy eyes, so sincere, but so devoid of that fire-like glow of Mamie's, and then met her lips with a passionate kiss, but the response was so lacking in warmth that it made him wonder if the love he had once known with her had become dormant through change and environment.

Robert had decided to go to a hotel for the night so as to not disturb them early next morning, then tip-toeing in to the children's room and kissing them all, bringing tears to his eyes, he hurriedly bade farewell to Betty and her mother and passed quickly into the beautiful summer night, afraid that his deeper emotions would get the best of him before he got away.

Back at his hotel and pondering over the result of his trip, Robert decided that with the exception of a few hours of real happiness with Mamie, the balance of the visit had been more or less a bore to him. True, he had felt a certain pleasure with Betty, and taking the children again in his arms, but it seemed so transient that now it was more like a dream. He knew now that he must reach a conscientious decision, as to whether life in the future was to be, first duty and then love with Betty, or love first and then duty with Mamie, a question that was now so paramount in his mind that it excluded all others, till at last his overworked nerves apparently snapped from the great strain to be followed by a peaceful sleep that took possession of his tired body.

Next morning he was homeward-bound after he had first dropped a picture post-card to Mamie, saying, "My dear Mamie, I very much regret having to advise that unforeseen circumstances have called me back to my business much sooner than I expected, so that for the present, I will be obliged to postpone my intended visit with you to your home till a more convenient date."

Pondering his problem and thinking of what explanation he would give his customers for his sudden departure. He wondered if there was no way back to peace and his own identity and

former way of life. The very foundations on which his life had been built now seemed about to be engulfed in an abyss of unbelief. He would like to get some advice on his problems from Sandy, whose candid opinions he had always valued, but now that he was tied up matrimonially, and was also Betty's brother-in-law, could he give the same neutral advice? Robert decided that he couldn't and that he must decide for himself. Soon he reached his home, more like an empty shell than ever, where the only welcome he received was from his dog Kamerad. He would have sold out his business for the first offer and tried again to run away from it all had he not run into a lot of piled-up business, so that he was kept too busy for the next few days to do anything but work, eat and sleep.

As soon as he could he wrote all his friends letting them know where he was and giving a full explanation of why he had not done so before, as the papers still continued to write up his story, and he knew it would be only a matter of time till his present whereabouts would be known. As for playing a hero's part, he had no use for the role, feeling that big ovations too often are nothing more than hollow mockery, and in his case especially so, as what good was worldly honor to one whose very soul seemed to be like an erupting volcano. In his letter to Betty, his words were imbued with sympathetic affection for her and love for the children, but nevertheless it indicated a strained relation and closed with, "As ever yours, Robert." But the letter to Mamie, although couched in general terms with references to pleasant memories of her father and mother and their own young days, portrayed the feelings of a loving heart!

Prompt replies were received from all to whom he had written, including his parents in Ontario, who insisted that he come home at once. He realized that was a most important duty, but it meant he would have to sell his business, which each day was enlarging, owing to new settlers. Betty's letter contained routine news of home doings and a report of a letter from Sandy saying he had important news for Robert. She had sent him Robert's address. Her letter, as a whole, was written in a clear vein of sincerity, but lacked that infectious magnetism that makes the recipient's heart beat a little faster. The whole letter was disappointing, as were other letters of hers. One of the most pleasant and surprising letters came from Sandy, for in it, after saying how happy he was about Robert's return from the dead, he stated that he had an offer of \$10,000

for Robert's farm. In addition he said that all indebtedness had been paid, owing to good crops, and that there was \$4,300 in the bank. He had wanted to turn that over to Betty but she had always said that she wanted him to keep it until such time as the children might want it for schooling. Sandy asked him to answer at once or, better still, come in person. With this great news, he did not ponder over his good luck but raised his eyes to God, as he said, "Our loving Father in Heaven, if this is token of Thy love and care, grant that wisdom may be given me to use it to Thy honor and glory." Long ago he had given up hopes of ever seeing the place again, so, to be informed of this satisfactory condition of affairs, was enough to raise any one's morale. He wrote at once confirming the sale, if Sandy thought it advisable, and promising to see him soon.

Early fall business kept him busy but in his quieter moments he could not help but think of the big question regarding Betty and the children, as three months had already slipped away. Finally, one evening when his accumulated mail had him down, and his mind was so befogged he could not concentrate on his chief problem, he swept all his papers to the ground and dropped down beside them as he poured out his soul to God in prayer. "Oh Merciful God, I bow before Thy throne of mercy knowing that after years of trying to do Thy will, I have failed many times. I admit the doubts which have been raised in my mind because of trials and adversities, for I believed in my egotism that I could discern right from wrong, but this error was forcibly brought home to me in that great vision when I stood before Thy throne of grace as a hypocrite. Now Thou who knows the innermost secrets of my soul, I ask that wisdom be given me that I may settle the great problem now preying on my mind without any selfish or ulterior motives, knowing that only in so doing can I expect peace of mind, and guidance in Thy sight. This I ask with all the sincerity of my soul. Amen, Amen."

Rising from his knees, he remained seated for over two hours, his mind clear and bright, reviewing the situation of his relations with Betty from every possible angle. He thought of their courtship and marriage, their misunderstandings, the words of condemnation that both had used to the other in spasms of anger, their entirely different dispositions, the children, and finally the unresponsive feeling noted at their last meeting. Then an inner voice in clear firm tones said, "Betty will be happier with the children than

with you." So impressive was this voice that he was convinced that his prayer was answered. Two days later a personal letter was sent to Betty, in which he tried to indicate in the simplest possible way the severance of their family ties from then on. However, he expressed very definitely, the wish that they would always remain friends, and that he would have the privilege of seeing the children whenever opportunity permitted. He hoped she would ask his advice regarding the rearing of the children, if she needed it. With this letter dispatched he felt that a burden had been lifted from his shoulders. His morale also increased.

At Thanksgiving time, Robert would have liked to visit Sandy, who had sold the farm for him, but his clerk was quarantined with measles thus scotching that plan. He consoled himself with the idea that he would go there for Christmas, and carried on the store as best he could. However, two weeks after Thanksgiving he received a larger letter than usual from Mamie (he hadn't yet told her of his decision re Betty) who insisted he spend Christmas holidays at her home as she intended taking two weeks' leave. If at all possible she wanted him there the evening of December 21st, as that was the night of their church concert. Her father was convening it and had personally asked her to make this request. Robert at once decided he would go, whatever happened, and from then on he burned the midnight oil when necessary to ensure his making the trip.

It seemed to Robert as if time had taken wings, for, before he knew it, the day of days was just around the corner. He had sent out many beautiful gifts to his friends, especially Betty and the children, besides those he was taking with him. And then a surprise came to him in a letter he received from Betty along with some gifts. He had rather expected it before, but here it was:

Dear Robert.

I duly received your letter, but there seemed so little I could say in reply, that I delayed answering sooner. Although my heart goes out to you for your unselfish action on my behalf, I cannot help feeling keenly that life has been harsh in its dealings with us, for few are called upon to bear such vicissitudes. Still, as I have said before, I am willing to make the sacrifice it entails that you, in some measure, may be compensated for all you have passed through and my greatest wish is for your happiness.

"Betty".

He wept as he read it, then carefully folding it he put it in a safe place as a cherished memento. It often caused him to ponder on the cost of its words to the writer. The day following Robert boarded the train for Glendale—and Mamie!

The Rev. Boswell and Mamie were there to meet his train, although it ran more than an hour late and both greeted him with the greatest affection as he alighted. They then hurried him to a taxi-sleigh and soon reached home, where he was greeted by Mrs. Boswell in a more affected manner than ever before. She had remained at home so that the evening meal would be on time, thus making sure they'd get to the concert in good time. To Robert, the cozy living-room with its bright coal fire and large Christmas tree, the pleasing home-cooked meal, the happy conversation and the innate kindness of the minister and his wife, and of course, Mamie, were all parts of a mosaic which spelled "home" to him, after his solitary life at Decision Lake.

At the concert, the program of choruses, childrens' songs, and plays was most enjoyable to Robert and, indeed, everyone there, and at its conclusion Robert was called to the platform by Rev. Boswell, as guest of honor and given a most enthusiastic welcome by the large gathering on being told that Mr. Benson or Robert, as he knew him best, was one of his early church members and had given most efficient service in his ministry in Ontario. He then briefly mentioned his war record, some of his many trials, especially the one confirming his death and the great joy it had brought him to learn that God had brought him safely through it all. Robert then, in his usual shy but sincere manner, thanked the minister and members of the church for their warm reception, not forgetting to offer sincere congratulations to those who had participated in the concert.

After walking home from the concert, where, incidentally Santa Claus had concluded the proceedings with a great distribution of gifts to everyone, they all gathered round the fire and had a snack, as they indulged in reminiscences of recent and not so recent years. After a while Rev. and Mrs. Boswell, tired from their strenuous labours, decided it was time to retire, and it was only a few minutes after they'd gone upstairs that Mamie decided that the old haircloth sofa, inviting and restful, would be much more comfortable for them than the chairs. As they took possession, hands linked together, memories quickly came to Robert's mind of those glorious hours he had last spent on it, so that he

was quite in the right mood when Mamie, without hesitation, put her arms around his neck and with a caressing hug, kissed him, as she sighed, "Oh, Robert, it hardly seems possible I am with you again!" Robert responded warmly, holding her in his arms until the moonbeams first sighted through the window when the Boswells went to bed, had faded entirely away. Robert did find time, however, to bring Mamie completely up to date on the situation regarding Betty and the children.

Although Mamie could not help having a feeling of deep sympathy for Betty in the position in which she found herself, still was human enough to believe 'self-preservation is the first law of nature' and she felt she was doing her no injustice now in letting her feelings be known to Robert. Had she not also paid the penalty for egotism and selfishness when she had written that letter which, no doubt, had taken so many years of happiness out of her life? It was with a feeling of deep contentment and mutual understanding such as they had not known for years that they parted that night, both realizing that a clear conscience before God is one's greatest reward.

At noon-time dinner next day, Robert spoke quite freely of the breaking of his family ties with Betty, causing surprised looks from the Boswells but no comment; also of the good news he had received from Sandy of the sale of his farm. In the evening they all went visiting to the Jones', close friends of the Boswells' and ardent church workers, where, after some time spent in music and games, Robert was asked to relate his war experiences. He interested them particularly with his stories of the mining of Hill Thirtyfour, his plane combat and fall into the garden of Carl's grandmother and his rescue from the battlefield by his faithful dog. But, through it all could be detected a note of unrest and anxiety to be moving. Thus, it wasn't surprising to Mamie, when, after they'd reached home and the Boswells had retired, Robert beckoned her on to the chesterfield where they were once again in each others' arms.

Caresses took the place of words until Robert, in desperation, at last raised Mamie's face nearer to his and, looking intently in her eyes, said, "Mamie, my dear, when I promised to pay you this visit, it was not with any intention of asking what I am going to now. But since I met you at the station, it seems that every beat of my heart seems to say, 'you cannot go without her'. So, hurriedly as it may seem, I ask you now, will you be my wife?" Mak-

ing it more emphatic, if it were possible, with a passionate kiss, Mamie replied without hesitation, "Yes, Robert, nothing in life will give me more pleasure now, since I know I am not going to be responsible for breaking up another's happiness." For some moments their hearts both seemed lodged in their throats, then Robert finally said, "I now realize the great truth of the saying, 'the darkest hour is just before the dawn', for mine certainly was!" Now relaxed it seemed easy to talk about future plans, Robert first expressing the wish that they be married by New Year's, so that they could spend their honeymoon among their old friends in the east which he had promised to do. On their return they could come home by way of Badgerton, and call upon Sandy, so he could also settle up his business, and make plans for the future.

At first Mamie felt it would be impossible, as she felt sure her parents would want a church wedding, but it was finally decided to hold the wedding on New Year's Day in time to take the evening train east, if her parents were agreeable. This would require Mamie going to the city at once for a trousseau and Robert to make the necessary arrangements.

With a lingering goodnight kiss, they went to their rooms, not to sleep, but to think over the great changes impending in their lives.

They both entered the living room-together next morning. Mr. Boswell was reading while Mrs. Boswell finished the table arrangements. As she said, "Good morning" to her father Mamie put her arms about his neck, and plucking up courage, continued, "Father, Robert has again asked me to be his wife, and we want your approval and blessing. As his time is limited, we would like to be married on New Year's Day." Her mother hearing what had been said, quickly joined the circle, and the next few minutes were spent in fond embrace and congratulations. As he joined their hands together, Mamie's father said, "My children, I could not withhold my consent, knowing as I do the trusting love you both have always held for each other, even under the most severe trials that few are called upon to face in this life. I know your mother will join me in giving consent, knowing that the adversities you both have passed through, have been the fires that burn the dross from the gold. You know your true feelings for each other, as I believe I know them from my observations since your childhood days."

Breakfast was then served, but little was eaten owing to the excited conversation that was carried on, with a recital of all the plans that had been decided on. A church wedding was suggested with an open invitation to the members of Rev. Boswell's congregation and their friends in the small town. This was finally decided upon, although personally it was not favored by Robert who had no use for undue excitement, of which the past few years of his life had been made up.

They went to the city on the evening train that day so that they could make various purchases early next day, including the wedding ring, and returned 24 hours later with all their lists filled. At home once more they told the Boswell's of all their purchases, and as midnight was approaching, they all went to bed, tired but happy.

Christmas day was soon at hand with all its usual atmosphere of peace and goodwill, and everyone was at the breakfast table promptly so that Rev. Boswell would have plenty of time to check his sermon for the Christmas service at 11 o'clock, and to word the open invitation he intended to make for the wedding on New Year's Day.

At the end of the usual notices, Rev. Boswell said, "My dear friends, to-day I have one of the pleasantest duties of my life to perform. Yet, I must admit that it also gives me some measure of pain as it means the departure of our daughter from our home, inasmuch as she has become engaged to Robert Benson. Their marriage will be held in this church on New Year's Day, one week from to-day, at four in the afternoon to which we invite you with all your friends to be present. In Robert Benson, whom I have known from childhood, I feel I have found a son, who has not only proved himself a hero in his country's service but a greater hero in the Master's Vineyard. As to my daughter, no one could any more efficiently fill her place in a home, and as most of you are acquainted with the work she has done among you, I need say no more."

Too soon for Rev. and Mrs. Boswell, New Year's Day arrived. The Ladies' Aid of the church had decorated the building and were also providing the wedding luncheon, as a special tribute to the bride's parents and the bride. Long before the ceremony the church was filled, with an overflow in the basement. Soon the strains of the wedding march played on a piano moved in for the occasion, called everyone to attention as the wedding proces-

sion started from the hallway at the rear. The bright rays of the afternoon sun shone through the windows on the bride with her two flower girls, as her father read the words of the ceremony, while the groom, handsome and upright listened attentively as if to make sure that at last this beautiful girl would become his for life.

At the luncheon many toasts were given and responded to, with Robert replying to the toast to the bride in particularly eloquent form, referring as he did, to the time when he had first met the girl who was to-day his beautiful bride.

After going back to the manse to change into travelling clothes the happy couple and entourage finally arrived at the station as the train they were to leave on, was pulling in. Fond farewells were hurriedly made while the tears were bravely held back, and finally the train bore Robert and Mamie away on the first leg of their lifetime journey together through life. Back in their home, now so vacant, it seemed, the Boswells sat facing each other with tear-stained eyes, and dispirited countenance, till all at once as if by inspirational thought, he said, "Mary, I have never had Truth more favorably impressed upon my mind, than now by that beautiful old hymn, we have sung so many times.

God moves in a mysterious way,
His wonders to perform;
He plants His footsteps in the sea,
And rides upon the storm."

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NAME	RETURN	
RUTH	MAR 15 1968	
NAME	AGE	77

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MAR 15 1988

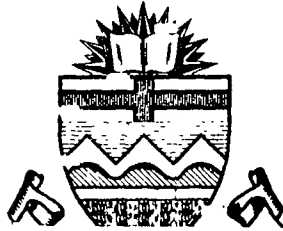
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